Mightier than the Sword

By Alphonse Courlander

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To Philip Gibbs, without whose
"Street of Adventure" this novel
never had been written, in
all friendship from
A. Thomas Cullanders
July. 1912.

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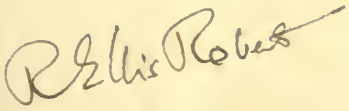

MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Crown 8vo, Cloth, **6/-**

THE SACRIFICE. (Also a SIXPENNY EDITION.)

EVE'S APPLE.

HENRY IN SEARCH OF A WIFE.

UNCLE POLPERRO.

LONDON: T. FISHER UNWIN

39444

MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

BY

ALPHONSE COURLANDER

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
ADELPHI TERRACE
1912

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PART I

EASTERHAM

MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

I

If you had been standing on a certain cold night in January opposite the great building where *The Day* is jewelled in electric lights across the dark sky, you would have seen a little, stout man run down the steps of the entrance at the side, three at a time, land on the pavement as if he were preparing to leap the roadway, with the sheer impetus of the flight of steps behind him, and had suddenly thought better of it, glance hurriedly at the big, lighted clock whose hands, formed of the letters *T-H-E D-A-Y*, in red and green electric lights, showed that it was nearly half-past twelve, and suddenly start off in a terrible hurry towards Chancery Lane, as though pursued by some awful thing.

Considering the bulkiness of the little man, he ran remarkably well. He dodged a light newspaper van that was coming recklessly round Fetter Lane, for there was none of the crowded traffic of daylight to be negotiated, and then, he turned the corner of Chancery Lane—and there you would have seen the last of him. He would have vanished from your life, a stumpy little man, with an umbrella popped under one arm, a bundle of papers grasped in his hand, a hat jammed down on

his head, and the ends of a striped muffler floating in the breeze of his own making.

The sight of a man running, even in these days when life itself goes with a rush, is sufficient to awaken comment in the mind of the onlooker. It suggests pursuit, the recklessness of other days; it impels, instinctively, the cry of "Stop, thief," for no man runs unless he is hunted by a powerful motive. Therefore it may be assumed that since I have sent a man bolting hard out of your sight up the lamp-lit avenue of Chancery Lane, you are wondering why the devil he's in such a hurry.

Well, he was hurrying because the last train to Shepherd's Bush goes at 12.35, and, as he had been away from home since ten o'clock that morning, he was rather anxious to get back. He could not afford a cab fare, though only a few hours ago he had been eating oysters, bisque soup, turbot, pheasant, asparagus out of season and pêche Melba at the Savoy Hotel with eighteenpence in his pocket—and the odd pence had gone to the waiter and the cloakroom man. So that by the time he had reached the top of Chancery Lane, dashed across the road and through the door of the station, where a porter would have slammed the grille in another second, and bought his ticket with an explosive, panting "Bush," he had just tenpence left.

The lift-man knew him, nodded affably and said "Just in time, Mr Pride."

"A hard run," said Mr Pride; and then with a cheery smile, "never mind; good for the liver." There were only a few people in the lift—four men and a woman to be precise. He knew the men as casual acquaintances of the last tube train. There was Denning, a sporting sub-editor on *The Lantern;* another was a proof-reader on one of the afternoon papers, who finished

work in the evening but never went home before the last tube ; then there was Harlem, the librarian of *The Day*, an amazing man who spoke all the European languages, and some of the Asiatic ones after his fifth glass of beer ; the fourth was a friend of Harlem, a moody young man who wore his hair long, smoked an evil-looking pipe, and seemed to be a little unsteady on his feet. As for the woman, Pride knew her well by sight. She had hair that was of an unreal yellow, and a latch-key dangled from her little finger as though it were a new kind of ring. She always got out at Tottenham Court Road.

As the lift went down, its high complaining noise falling to a low buzzing sound seemed like the tired murmur of a weary human being glad that rest had come at last. The sound of the approaching train came rolling through the tunnel. They all rushed desperately down the short flight of steps that led to the platform, as the train came in with a rattle of doors opening and slamming, and scrambled for seats, while the uniformed men, who appeared to be the only thoroughly wide-awake people in the neighbourhood, said in the most contradictory fashion : " Stand clear of the gates," " Hurry on, please," and " Passengers off first."

Pride found himself in the smoking carriage, opposite Harlem, with his young friend at his side. It never occurred to him that there was anything exceptional in his dash for the last train. He did it four nights out of the week, as a matter of course. He was fifty years old, though he pretended he was ten years younger, and shaved his face clean to keep up the illusion. He used to explain to his friends that he came of a family famous for baldness in early years.

" Been busy ? " asked Harlem, filling his pipe.

" Nothing to speak of," said Pride. " Turned up at

the office at eleven, but there was nothing doing until after lunch. Then I had to go and see Sir William Darton—they're going to start the Thames Steamboats again. He wasn't at home, and he wasn't in his office, but I found him at six o'clock in the Constitutional. Got back and found they'd sent home for my dress clothes, and left a nice little envelope with the ticket of the Canadian Dinner. . . . That's why I'm so late to-night. . . ."

Pride filled his own pipe, and sighed. "The old days are over!" he said. "They used to post our assignments overnight—'Dear Mr Pride, kindly do a quarter of a column of the enclosed meeting.' Why, *The Sentinel* used to allow us five shillings every time we put on evening dress."

"Well, *The Sentinel* was a pretty dull paper before the Kelmscotts bought it and turned it into a halfpenny," said Harlem. "Look at it now, a nice, bright paper—oh, by the way, do you know Cannock," he jerked his head to the man at his side. "He's *The Sentinel's* latest acquisition. This is Tommy Pride, one of the ancient bulwarks of *The Sentinel*, until they fired him. Now he's learning to be a halfpenny journalist."

Pride looked at the young man.

"I don't know about being the latest acquisition," Cannock said. "As a matter of fact, they've fired *me* to-day."

"It's a hobby of theirs now," Harlem remarked. "You'll get a job on *The Day* if you ask for one. There's always room with us, ain't there, Tommy?"

Pride looked wistfully at the clouds of blue smoke that rose from his lips. . . . Yes, he thought, there was always room on *The Day*—at any moment they might decide to make alterations in the staff. The fact

of Cannock's being sacked mattered nothing; he was a young man, and for young men, knocking at the door of Fleet Street, there was always an open pathway. Think of the papers there were left to work for—the evenings and the dailies, and even when they were exhausted, perhaps a job on a weekly paper, or the editorship of one of the scores of penny and sixpenny magazines. And, after that, the provinces and the suburbs had their papers. Pride knew: in his long experience he had wandered from one paper to another, two years here, three years here, until the halfpenny papers had brought a new type of journalist into the street.

"Married?" asked Pride.

"Not me!" replied Cannock, with a slight hiccough.

"Well, you're all right. You can free-lance if you want to."

"Oh, it's no good to me," Cannock said. "It's a dog's life anyhow, and I've only had two months of it. I'm going back to my guv'nor's business."

"Ah," said Pride, "there's no use wasting sympathy on you. Why did you ever leave it? What's his business?"

"That," Cannock laughed gaily and pointed to a poster as the train stopped at Tottenham Court Road Station. It was a great picture of barrels and barrels of beer, piled one above the other, reaching away into the far distance. Thousands of barrels under a vaulted roof. And in the foreground were little figures of men in white aprons with red jersey caps on their heads, rolling in more barrels, with their arms bared to the elbows. Across the picture in large letters Pride could read: "Cannock Brothers, Holloway. Cannock's Entire."

"Why, your people are worth millions!" Pride said. "What on earth are you doing in journalism."

"I know they are. That's what I was thinking of yesterday. I wondered how on earth they got anybody to do the work."

"Well, you won't mind me, I'm sure," Pride said, leaning over to Cannock. "I'm older than you, and I belong to what they call the old school of journalism. This isn't the lovely life some people think it must be, and it's going to get worse each year. We've got to fight for our jobs every day of our life. 'Making good,' they call it. I'm used to it," he said defiantly, looking at Harlem, "I like it. . . . I couldn't do anything else. I'm not fit for anything else. It has its lazy moments, too, and its moments of excitement and thrills. No, my son, you go back to the brewery, there's more money in it for you and all the glory you want with your name plastered over every bottle and on all the walls. Ask five hundred men in the street if they've ever heard of Tommy Pride. They've been reading things I've written every day, but they don't know who's written them. Ask 'em who's Cannock? Why, they'll turn mechanically into the nearest public-house and call for a bottle of you."

"I used to think it would be jolly to be on a newspaper," Cannock said. "My guv'nor got me the job. He's something to do with the Kelmscotts."

"So it is if you're meant to be on a newspaper. That's the trouble of fellows like you. You come out of nowhere, or from the 'Varsity, and get plunked right down in the heart of a London newspaper office—probably someone's fired to make room for you. You're friends of the editor and you think you're great men, until you find you're expected to take your turn with the rest. Then you grouse, because you're not meant for it. You've got appointments to keep at dinner-time, and you must get your meals regularly. Or you

want to write fine stuff and be great star descriptive men at once, or go to Persia and Timbuctoo, and live on flam and signed articles. But, if you were meant to be a reporter, you'd hang round the news editor's room for any job that came along, you'd take any old thing that was given you, and do it without a murmur, and when you've done that for thirty years you might meet success, and stay on until they shoved you out of the office."

He saw that Cannock was smiling, and seemed to read his thoughts.

"Me?" he said. "Oh, you mustn't judge by me. I belong to the old school, you know. I'm the son of my father—he was a Gallery man, and died worth three hundred pounds, and that's more than I am. I'm one of the products of the last generation, and all I want is £2 a week and a cottage in the country." The little man relit his pipe, and puffed contentedly. "Lord! I should like that!" he said.

"You're always frightened of being fired, Tommy," said Harlem. "You know well enough you're what we call a thoroughly reliable and experienced man, and Ferrol wouldn't have you sacked."

"There's always that bogy," Pride answered with a laugh. "You never know what may happen. The only thing is to join the Newspaper Press Fund and trust in the Lord. None of the youngsters do either of these things to-day."

Cannock and Harlem prepared to leave as the train slowed down before Marble Arch. "It's a rotten game," said Cannock. "I'm glad I'm out of it. Good-bye."

Pride took his hand. "Good-bye." He saw them pass the window, and wave to him as they went under the lighted "Way Out" sign, and then he turned to his papers with a sigh. But somehow or other he did not

read. He always carried papers about with him, through sheer force of habit, much as the under side of a tailor's coat lapel is bristling with pins. He had been with news all day; he had written some of it; he had read the same things in the different editions of the newspapers; he had left the street when they were printing more news; and the first thing he would do on waking up in the morning would be to reach out for a copy of *The Day* which was brought with the morning tea. He did not read news as the average man does—he regarded it objectively, reading it without emotion. The march of the world, the daily happenings moved him as much as a packet of loose diamonds moves the jeweller who handles them daily, and weighs them to see their worth.

He was thinking of Cannock, with his future all clear before him: Cannock, with beer woven into the fibre of his being, as news was in his. It must be rather fine to be independent like that. . . . Idly, he wondered what Cannock's guv'nor was like: did he admire these pictures of the vast hall crowded with beer barrels, enough to last London for a whole Saturday night, and ready to be filled up again for all the nights in the week. . . . He looked round the carriage at the faces of those who were travelling with him. Five boisterous young people were making themselves a noisy nuisance at one end of the carriage. Opposite him, in the seat lately occupied by Harlem, a working man was staring ahead of him with an empty wide stare as if, in a moment of absent-mindedness, his actual self had slipped away, and left a hulk of shabbily-clothed body, without a spark of intelligence. Others were nodding, half asleep, and there was one man, with closed eyes, and parted lips, breathing stertorously, whose head bobbled from side to side with the rocking of the

train. . . . He woke up, suddenly, as the train stopped with a jerk, and the conductor called out "'Perd's Bush."

Tommy Pride always gave his papers to the lift-man. They waited for the last passenger, who came lurching round the corner with his head still bobbling and his eyes half lost below the drooping eyelids. He steadied himself against the wall—and his hand spread over another of those glorious posters. What a picture for Cannock! . . . Somehow, Pride rejoiced to think that he was not Cannock.

He went past the Green to one of the small houses in a turning off the Uxbridge Road. The moon shone out of the wintry sky, white and placid, above his home. He let himself in, and turned out the flicker of gas in the hall. He walked on tiptoe into the sitting-room, and having taken off his boots went to the fireplace. Here on a trivet he found a cup of cocoa, and his slippers warming before the fire. There were three slices of thin bread and butter on the table. He never went to bed without his bread and butter. During his meal he saw a copy of *The Day* on a chair, and he read bits of it mechanically, for he had read it all before. The clock struck one, and he bolted the front door and went softly upstairs. As he turned on the light his wife stirred uneasily, and he came to the bedside. She opened her eyes at his kiss, and smiled tenderly at him.

"Is it very late, dear?" she asked.

"One o'clock."

"Poor sweetheart!" she murmured. "Did you have your cocoa?"

"Yes," he said.

"Tired?"

He laughed. "Not very. I'm a bit cheerful, to tell you the truth. Tell you about it in the morning. Ferrol spoke to me to-day. He's a fine chap."

II

THAT was the magic of it! Ferrol had spoken to him. The conversation had been quite ordinary. "Well, Pride, I hope things are going all right?" And Ferrol had nodded cheerfully and smiled as he passed into his room. Perhaps, he had asked Pride to come and see him. . . . It was not what Ferrol said that mattered: it was the Idea behind it—that Ferrol knew and remembered his men individually.

Out of the insensate tangle of machines and lives, high above the thunderous clamour of the printing-presses, the rolling of heavy vans stacked high with cylinders of paper, the ringing of telephone bells, the ticking and clicking and buzzing, floor above floor, of the great grey building in which they all lived, Ferrol rises with his masterful personality and calm voice, carving the chaos of it all into discipline and order. He looms, in the imagination, powerful and omnipresent, making his desires felt in the far corners of the continents.

Ferrol whispered, and Berlin, Vienna or San Francisco gave him his needs. He was the brain and the heart of the body he had created, and his nerves and his arteries were spread over the earth. He placed his fingers on the pulse of mankind, and knew what was ailing — knew what it wanted, and found the specialist to attend to it.

His influence lay over the narrow street of tall buildings, urging men onwards and upwards with the gospel of great endeavour. Some men, as their pagan ancestors worshipped the Sun as the God of Light, placed him on a pedestal in their hearts, and bowed down to him as the God of Success, for the energy of his spirit was everywhere. If you searched behind the ponderous double octuple machines, rattling and thudding, and driving the work of their world forward, you would have found it there—the motive power of the whole. It lurked in the tap-tap of the telegraph transmitter, in the quick click of the type in the slots of the linotype machines as the aproned operators touched the keyboard; it was in the heart of the reporter groping through the day for facts, and writing them with the shadow of Ferrol falling across the paper. The clerks in the counting-house, the advertising men, the grimy printers' boys in the basement, the type-setters and the block-makers on the top floors near the skylights, messengers, typists—they were all bricks in the edifice which was built up for the men who wrote the paper—the edifice of which Ferrol was the keystone.

His enemies distorted the vision of him; they saw him, an inhuman, incredible monster, with neither soul nor heart, grimly eager for one end—the making of money. They wrote of him as an evil thing, brooding over sensationalism. . . . One must see him as Tommy Pride and all those who worked for him on *The Day* saw him, eager, keen, and large-hearted, a wonderful blend of sentiment and business, torn, sometimes, between expediency and the hidden desires of his heart. One must see him reckless and, since he was only human, making mistakes, creating, destroying, living only for what the day brought forth. . . .

The spirit of Fleet Street, itself.

Like a silver thread woven into the texture of his character, in which good and evil were patterned as they are in most men, a streak of the sentimental was there, shining untarnished, a survival of his days of young romance. Very few people knew of this trait; Ferrol hugged it to himself secretly, as though it were a weakness of which he was ashamed. It came upon him at odd, unexpected moments when he was hemmed in by the gross materialism of every day, this passionate, sudden yearning for poetry and ideals. He would try to lift the latch of the door that had locked the world of beauty and art from him. Swift desires would seize him to be carried away in his motor-car, as if it were a magic carpet, to some Arcadia of dreaming shadows, with the sunlight splashing through the green roofs of the forests.

The sentimental in him would, at such times, find expression in many ways. He made extravagant gifts to people; he would take a sudden interest in the career of one man, and bring all that man's longings to realization by lifting him up and making his name. How glorious that power was to Ferrol! the power of singling men out, finding the spark of genius that he could raise to a steady flame, fanning it with opportunity; he could make a man suddenly rich with a stroke of his pen; pack him off to Arabia or South America and bid him write his best. Sometimes they failed, because it was not in them to succeed, and Ferrol was as merciless to failures as he was generous to those who won through.

The men he made! . . .

Sometimes, when the waves of sentiment swept over him, he would try and materialize his ideals for a time.

He would commission a great poet to contribute to *The Day;* he would open his columns to the cult of the beautiful, and then a grisly murder or a railway disaster would happen, crushing Ferrol's sentiment. Away with the ideal, for, after all, the world does not want it! Three columns of the murder or the railway disaster, with photographs, leaders, special articles, all turning round the news itself. That was how it was done.

And now the fit was on Ferrol as he sat in his room with the crimson carpet and the dark red walls, hung with contents bills of *The Day.* He had been going over the morning letters with his secretary, listening to the applications for employment. He made a point of hearing them, now and again. There was one letter there that suddenly awoke his interest; the name touched a chord in his memory, a chord that responded with a low, tender note . . . And, his mind marched back through the corridors of the past, until he came out upon the old, quiet, cathedral town of the days of his youth.

He saw himself, a slight, eager young man, long, long before his dreams of greatness came to pass, yet feeling in his heart that the plans he was making would be followed. A young Ferrol plotting within himself to wrest spoils from the world, longing intolerably for power and the wealth that could give it. Well did he know, even in those far-off days, that destiny was holding out her hands, laden with roses and prizes for him. . . . Those were the days of the young heart; the days of nineteen and twenty, and the first love, scarce understood, that comes to us, mysterious and beautiful. He saw a very different Ferrol then. The lip unshaven, that was now hidden with a bushy moustache turning grey; the hair, now also grey under the

touch of Time, silky and black. He saw this boy walking the lanes that led out of Easterham town, in the spring-time, with a girl at his side.

Over the abyss of the years the boy beckoned to him, and Ferrol looked back on a yesterday of thirty years. Her name was Margaret, and she was for him the beginning of things. From her he learned much of the tenderness of life, and the love of Nature that had remained with him. He was a clerk in an auctioneer's office then, with most of his dreams still undreamt. He and Margaret had been children together. They were children now, laughing, and walking over the fields with the spire of the cathedral, pointing like a finger to the skies, in the distant haze of the afternoon.

There was more purity in that first romance of his than in anything he had found in after years. Oh! wonderful days of young unsullied hearts, and the white innocence of life. The memory of evenings came to him, of kisses in the starlight, when incomprehensible emotions surged through him, vague imaginings of what life must really be, and the torture of unrest, of something that he did not understand. Her eyes were tearful, and yet she smiled, and at her smile they both laughed. And so the spell was broken, and they trudged, side by side, homeward in the silent night.

She inspired him, and in that, perhaps, she fulfilled her destiny. She sowed the seeds of ambition in his soul: he would dare anything for her, yea, reach his hand upwards, and pluck the very stars from Heaven to lay at her feet. And, very gradually, a dreadful nausea of Easterham came over him. His desk was by the window that looked upon the High Street: he almost remembered, now, the day when it first dawned on him that the place was no longer tolerable. It was

mid-day and the heat quivered above the cobble-stones: two dogs were fighting with jarring yelps that could be heard all down the street; the baker's cart went by with an empty rattle, and Miss Martin of Willow Hall drove in as usual to the bank next door. An old man was herding a flock of sheep towards the market-place, and the sheep-dog ran this way and that way, barking as he ran. Three sandwich-men, grotesquely hidden in boards, slouched past in frayed clothes and battered hats, with pipes in their mouths. He read their boards mechanically. . . . "Sale at Wilcox's. . . . Ladies' Undergarments . . . Ribbons." He had read the same thing every day in the week; he had looked out upon the same scene, every day, it seemed; the dogs had been quarrelling eternally, the shepherd passed and repassed like a never-ending silent dream; grocer, and baker, and banker, and Hargrave, the farmer . . . there he was again touching his hat to Miss Martin as she stepped from her trap. . . . O God! the heavy monotony of it all fell like a weight on his heart.

The nostalgia grew. The chimes of the cathedral lost their music, the stillness of the town became more unbearable than the turmoil and clatter of cities. There was something to be wrought for and fought for in the world outside. This was not life; this was a mausoleum!

The arguments with his father—his mother was dead—and the long time it took to persuade him. . . . The parting with Margaret, and the whispered vows and promises, spoken breathlessly from their earnest young hearts. It seemed they could never be broken.

He came to London. It was in the late seventies, at the beginning of the spread of education that has resulted in the amazing flood of periodicals: it was a

flood that led Ferrol on to fortune. His scope widened; he grew in his outlook, and saw that here was a way to power indeed. He shone like a new star over London, gathering lesser lights around him, developing that marvellous power of organization, that astonishing personality that drew men to him, until he seized his opportunity and bought the moribund *Day* when it was a penny paper on its last legs. In ten years' time he had become wealthy and powerful, and since then he had gone on and on until no triumph was denied him.

And Margaret . . .? The years passed, and with the passing of time, they both developed. That young love, once so irrefrangible, grew warped and misshapen, until it finally snapped. There was no quarrel; neither could reproach the other; they simply grew out of their love, as so many young people do. There was a correspondence for a time, but it slackened and presently ceased altogether. She must have felt her hold loosening on Ferrol, as with a thousand new interests he came upon the wide horizon of life. She must have noticed this in his letters, and instead of seeking to bind him to her against his will, she just let him go. And Ferrol must have weighed the impossibility of asking her to marry him at this point of his career, when he was striving and struggling upwards; not all men travel the fastest when they travel alone, but Ferrol was one of those who could run no risk of being delayed. They had none of the pang of parting . . . but years afterwards, when Ferrol was a childless widower (for he married when he was thirty-five, and walked behind his wife's coffin two years afterwards), he wondered what had become of Margaret, and always he cherished that memory of his one romance that had tapered away out of his life. He could never forget the sweet simplicity

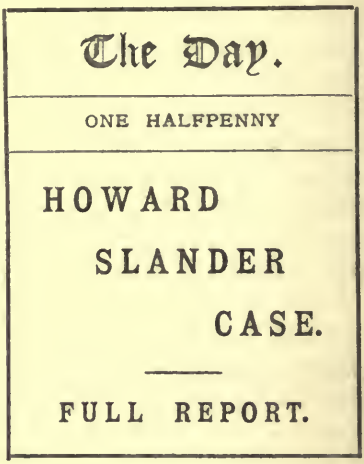
of Margaret's face, the tears on her eyelashes, and the yielding softness of her youth when he pressed her to his heart and lips with wonderful thoughts quivering through his soul.

He remembered one day in his life, a few years after the death of his wife, when a wild desire had seized him to handle his past again, as an antiquarian turns over his treasures and rejoices in some ancient relic. It was a day in summer, when the heat was heavy over London, and the city smelt of hot asphalt and tar: without a word to anybody he had left his work and taken the train, back to Easterham and his youth.

The old familiar landmarks rose up before him, bringing a strange feeling of age to him. So much had happened in the interval that it seemed that year upon year had piled up a wall before him, separating him for evermore from this old world that had been. The ivy still clung to the castellated walls of the Cathedral close; the clock chimed as he went by, just as he had heard it chime in the long days that were gone. The very rooks seemed unchanged as they clamoured huskily in the old beeches.

And yet, with it all, there was something different, and he knew that the difference lay not so much with the place as with himself. His entire perception had altered. He saw things through eyes that had grown older. The High Street, with its brooding air of stillness, that had once seemed so stale and intolerable to him, now appealed to him with its wondrous peace, a magical spot far away from the turmoil of things. There were the same names over the grocers' and the drapers' and the ironmongers' shops, but old Matthew Bethell's quaint bookshop had gone, and in its place there stood a large green, flat-fronted establishment,

with an open window stacked high with magazines and newspapers, and a great poster above it, thus:



The sentimental in him winced, but the material business man glowed with pride as he saw the great poster, proclaiming *The Day* paramount over its rivals. There was always a conflict between the two men that made up that complex personality known as Ferrol. He went to the house where he had once lived; his father was dead now, and as he looked up at the open window and saw a strange woman doing some needlework, it seemed to him as if the people that were living there had laid sacrilegious hands upon the holy fragrance of the past; as if their prying eyes had peered into all the hidden secrets that belonged to him. He turned away resentfully towards the old inn, the Red Lion, whose proprietor, old Hamblin, remembered him from other days when he revealed himself, and was inclined to be overcome with the importance of the visit, until Ferrol put him at his ease. They chatted together, the

old man, with his back to the fireplace, coat-tails lifted from habit, for the grate was empty on this hot day, Ferrol sitting astride a chair, watching the blue stream of smoke that came from Hamblin's lips as he puffed at his long white churchwarden. . . . Hamblin must have stood like that during all the years that Ferrol had been in London. The only change that came to the people of Easterham was death.

They talked of people they had known, and so the talk came naturally to Margaret. He listened unmoved to the news of her marriage, and found that nothing more than conventional phrases came from his lips when Hamblin told him of her death. Somehow, it seemed to him so natural. He had been away seventeen years, and Easterham had lost its hold upon him now. The death of his father . . . the new face at the window of their house. . . . The death of Margaret seemed to come as a natural sequence to things.

Hamblin went on talking about people. "She married Mr Quain, one of the College schoolmasters. . . . I expect he was after your time . . . a good deal older than you, Mr Ferrol. . . . They had one child, a boy . . . living with his aunt now. All her people left Easterham years ago. . . ." And so on.

It was in the afternoon that Ferrol came back to London, feeling that he had been prodding at wet moss-grown stones in some old decayed ruin, turning them over to see what he could find, and having them crumble apart in his hands. He never went back again.

That was thirteen years ago. Ferrol's memories ended abruptly. He touched a button, and a young man, with a shiny, pink face and fair hair parted in the middle, came in with a notebook and pencil in his hand. He looked as if he spent every moment of his

spare time in washing his face. There was a quiet, nervous air about him—the air of one who is never certain of what is going to happen next. Ferrol's abrupt sentences always unnerved him.

"Trinder," he said, "there was a letter among the lot to-day. Quain. Written on *Easterham Gazette* notepaper. Asking for editorial employment."

"Yes, sir." Trinder had long ceased to marvel at Ferrol's memory for details.

"Write to him the usual letter asking him to call. Wednesday at twelve."

Trinder made a note and withdrew.

Ferrol wondered what Margaret's boy was like.

III

At the age of twenty Humphrey Quain found himself on the threshold of a world of promise. It seemed to him that if, out of all the years of time, he could have chosen the period in which he would live, he would have picked out the dawn of this twentieth century of grace. England was just then in the throes of casting from herself the burden of old traditions. The closing years of the nineties had been years of preparation and development — years of broadening minds and new ideas, until quite suddenly, it seemed, the century turned the corner, and yesterday became old-fashioned in a day, and all eyes were fixed on the glorious sunrise of the twentieth century — the wonderful century.

People, you remember, played with the fantasy of beginning a brand-new century as if it were a new toy. Nobody who was living could remember the birth of the last century. It was a new emotion for everyone. There was the oddity of writing dates, discarding for ever the 189— and beginning with 19—; old phrases, such as *fin-de-siècle*, became suddenly obsolete; new phrases were coined, among which, "Twencent" (an abbreviation for twentieth century, and a tribute to the snap and hustle with which the world was now expected to go) survived the longest; songs were sung at music-halls; there was a burst of cartoons on the subject; people referred jokingly to the last century, parodying the recollections of boresome centenarians; while the unhappy *Nineteenth Century*, as though the calendar

had taken a mean advantage of its mid-Victorian dignity, determined never again to risk being so hopelessly out of date, and added to its title the words "and After," thereby enabling future centuries to go for ever without ruffling its title.

In the midst of this change, when the death of Queen Victoria seemed to snap the present from the past irrevocably, and the novelty of a king came to England again; when the first of the tubes that now honeycomb London was a twopenny wonder, and people were talking of Shepherd's Bush, and Notting Hill Gate, and marvelling curiously why they had never talked of them before; when Socialism was burrowing and gnawing like a rat at the old, worn fabric of Society, urging the working-man to stand equal in Parliament with the noblest lords in the land. In the midst of all this there arose suddenly, born with the twentieth century, the Young Man. He had already come, answering the call of the country in the dark disillusioning days of the Boer War. People had seen the young clerks and workmen of England marching shoulder to shoulder down the streets of London, like the train-bands of Elizabethan days. When the country was in peril the flower and the youth of England came to its aid, and the older men could do nothing but stay at home and look on.

The young man, scorned by his elders in all the periods of the nineteenth century except those last years of development, found himself suddenly caught up on the high wave that was sweeping away the rubbish and the sentiment and the lumber of the old customs, and borne above them all. He was set on a pinnacle, as the new type; the future of the world was said to be in the hands of the young men; the old men—even forty was too old, you remember—had

had their day. They were now like so much old furniture, shabby and undesirable, second-hand goods, better replaced by strong, well-made, up-to-date things.

It really was a wonderful time for the Young Man. In the old days it had been customary for him to show respect to his elders, to call them "sir," to stand up when they came into a room, or raise his hat if they met in the streets, to offer his seat to them if there was none vacant, and generally to treat them as old ladies, with polite reverence mingled with awe.

The worship of age had become a fetish; it was improper to criticize the opinions of a man older than yourself; it was heresy to think that you were as capable as the old men; youth had to wait and grow old for its chances in life; youth was ridiculed, snubbed and held in the leash.

And then, quite suddenly it seemed, though Ibsen had heard it knocking at the door long before, the younger generation burst upon us with an astonishing vigour, taking possession of the new century, trampling down the false gods of age and bringing in its train, like boys trooping from a nursery, hosts of new toys and new ideas in everything.

It was, I think, *The Day* that finally discovered the Young Man. Ferrol had known the bitter opposition which he had fought in his own twenties and thirties, and he shone as the apostle of youth. The Young Man, from a neglected embryo, became a national asset; all hands were uplifted to him in the dawn of the new century. He was enthroned in the seats from which his elders were deposed.

People seeking for a symbol of the new life that was beginning, looked westwards and found a whole nation that typified the Young Man who was to be their

salvation. They found America, eager, with strident voice, forceful and straining its muscles to the game of life—a whole nation of young men. It became the fashion to take America as a model. There was an invasion of boots and bicycles and cameras. "Look," every one cried, "see how they do things better than we do. Look at their magazines—how wonderful they are." Phonographs, kinetoscopes, the first jumpy cinematographs, photo-buttons, chewing-gum, they came to the country, and were hailed gladly as from the land of Young Men.

Presently the young men themselves came. They came with their hair parted in the middle, and keen, clean-shaven faces with very predominant chins. They were mere boys, and they had a bounce and a boisterous assurance that took one's breath away. With them came loudly-striped shirts, multi-coloured socks, felt hats and lounge suits in city offices, and, later, soft-fronted shirts and black silk bows for evening wear. They opened London offices for New York firms, and showed us card-indexing systems, roll-top desks, dictaphones and loose-leaf ledgers. All letters were typewritten, and the firm who sent out a letter in the crabbed handwriting of its senior clerk was accounted disgracefully behind the times.

The Young Man set the pace with a vengeance, and it was a panting business to keep abreast of him.

Cock-tails and quick-lunch restaurants appeared next; griddle-cakes, clam-chowder and club sandwiches were shown to us; and finally, as though having absorbed their nutriment, we had assimilated their habits, a fierce desire to speak with a nasal accent took hold of us.

The man who wanted to get a job spoke with as much American accent as he could muster up; he looked American, and he affected American ways; his

affirmative was "sure," and he wore his hair long and sleek, divided evenly in the middle. He was the Young Man, cocksure, enthusiastic and determined—the most remarkable product of his time.

Ferrol found him, a year or so before he arrived, with that instinct of his, almost second-sight, which never failed. He boomed him as a Type; he glorified him, and gave him high posts in the office of *The Day*. With the exception of Neckinger, the editor, who came straight from New York, he was the native product, and Ferrol was always on the look-out for more of him.

And so, in the midst of all this, when the cry for the Young Man was at its hungriest, when "hustle" and "strenuous" were added to the vocabulary, we see Humphrey Quain, waiting on the outskirts, watching his opportunity, and meanwhile bending over the counter of the *Easterham Gazette* office, coat off and shirt sleeves turned back to the elbow, folding up copies of the *Easterham Gazette* as they came damp, with the ink wet on them, from the printing-press in the basement.

The *Easterham Gazette* was, unhesitatingly, the worst paper in Easterham. It was an eight-page weekly journal, with a staff of one editor, one reporter and Humphrey Quain. When things were slack in the reporting line, the reporter (an extraordinarily shaggy person called Beaver, whose thumbs were always covered with ink) was expected to "fill up time at case"—which means that he was to assist in setting up the paper in type. The editor, whose name was Worthing, walked about in a knickerbocker suit and a soft grey hat, and it was part of his business to obtain advertisements for the *Gazette*. The leading articles he wrote were always composed with one eye on the advertiser. In praising the laudable action of Councillor

Bilson in opposing the introduction of trams into the town, there was a pleasant parenthesis, something in this manner: "It needs no words of ours to echo the praise bestowed on that gallant champion of our town, our much-respected Councillor Bilson (in whose windows, by the way, there is a remarkable exhibit of Oriental coffee-making) . . ." and so on.

It was Beaver's duty to make the "calls" during the week. How he managed them all, I don't know; but in the intervals of attending the police-court, the council meetings, and all the meetings of local organizations, he would call at the hospital, at the mayor's parlour, on the town clerk, on the churches and cathedrals, snapping up unconsidered trifles in the shape of accidents, civic news, church services, and all the other activities of Easterham life. Sometimes during the week Beaver would swing himself astride a bicycle, as frayed and as shabby as himself, and pedal to Wimberly, or Pooleham, or further afield to Great Huxton for local meetings, all of which were of vast interest to the *Easterham Gazette*, since its copies went weekly—or were supposed to go—over the whole of the county, and it had annexed to its title the names of all the best villages. Its full title, by the way, was: *Easterham Gazette, and Wimberly, Pooleham, Great Huxton, Middle Huxton and Little Huxton Chronicle; Coomber, Melsdom and Upper Thornton Journal*, largest circulation in any district, weekly one penny. It was nigh upon sixty years of age, and therefore its tottering infirmity may be excused.

Humphrey Quain came into the office ostensibly as a clerk. In the beginning he thought it was a fascinating game seeing the things that one wrote in print. Therefore, all unconsciously, he started to write. He began with "Cycle Notes" and "Theatre Notes," and presently he found himself with sufficient interest to fill

a whole column, which dealt mainly with local gossip, and was called "The Easterham Letter." It was addressed always to the editor and was signed "P and Q." When he was not writing, he was addressing wrappers or making out the weekly bills for the newsagents; and every Friday evening he stood by the counter, folding up the papers as they came to him, and handing them to grubby little children who were sent by the newsagents, or sold the papers for themselves in the streets.

It really was a remarkable paper for the twentieth century. Its advertisement space was one shilling an inch, or less if you promised not to tell any one; three men, of course, could not fill the whole of these eight great sheets, and therefore the carrier's wagon delivered every Thursday to the *Easterham Gazette* office, mysterious thin brown parcels the size of a column, and rather heavy. Simultaneously, all over the country, like parcels were being delivered, and, if by chance you compared an issue of the *Easterham Gazette* with any thirty local papers in the North, South, or East of England, you would have been amazed at the remarkable similarity of their contents. They had the same serial story of thrilling adventure, the same "Cookery Notes and Kitchen Recipes," the same "Home Hints to Household Happiness," word for word, and the same column of jokes.

For these long parcels that arrived every Thursday at the *Easterham Gazette* office were columns of type cast from moulds, sent down from a London Agency which has made a mighty business of supplying general matter, from foreign intelligence to fashion notes, ready for the printing-press, at so much a column. They call it "stereo."

Humphrey Quain had been in the office for three

years. His aunt was a friend of Mr Worthing, the editor, and his father thought it would be a good thing for the boy to have some association with the world of letters, however distant. Shortly afterwards, Quain senior had taken a master's appointment in a private boarding-school at Southsea, and Humphrey remained with his aunt. A year later his father died.

He parted with his father with a straining heart, for Daniel Quain was a tremendous success as a father, though he was a failure as a man. Of course this was only Humphrey's point of view: what more could a boy want than a father who could fashion any kind of toy, from whistles to steamboats, out of a block of wood; who knew enough of elementary science to make a pin sail on water, by letting it rest on a cigarette paper which soaked and sank away, leaving the pin afloat; who could blow a halfpenny from one wine-glass to another, and produce whooing sounds from a hollow tube by placing it over a gas flame. Wonderful father!

It was Daniel who fostered in Humphrey's heart the love of reading: those early books were adventure stories by Fenimore Cooper, Kingston and Ballantyne. He read Harrison Ainsworth, too, and Henty, and took in the *Boy's Own Paper*, and, in short, did everything in the way of reading that a normal, happy, healthy-minded boy should do. "Keep clear of philosophy until you are thirty," Daniel said one day, as he was showing him how three matches can be made to stand upright; "then you won't understand enough of life to be miserable."

Later, he came to the Dickens and Thackeray stage, but he was pained to find he could not enjoy Scott. He confided his distaste to his father, as though it were a guilty failing of which to be ashamed.

"Form your own likes and dislikes in reading as in everything else," said Daniel. "Don't be a literary snob, and pretend you enjoy the acquaintance of books merely because they belong so to speak to the 'upper ten' of the book-world."

When his father died, Humphrey was first brought face to face with the stern things of life. It was a chance remark of his aunt that gave him the first glimpse. "You'll have to do something for yourself, Humphrey," she said one day. "That father of yours did nothing for you." She always spoke bitterly of his father.

Humphrey had never thought of it before. It had seemed to him that things came naturally to people from father to son: that, in some mysterious, unthought-of way, when he was about twenty or so, he would find himself with an income of sorts, or some settled employment.

"You must Get On," said his aunt, looking at him through her spectacles. "Young men Get On quickly to-day. You must grasp your opportunities."

So here came a new and delightful interest into Humphrey's existence. He perceived something fine in it all. From that day he had one creed in life: the creed of Getting On. This determination swamped every other interest in life. It was as if his aunt had suddenly touched upon some internal button that had started off a driving-wheel within him, and set all the machinery of energy into movement. How did one "Get On" in the world? He began to take an enormous interest in everything, to follow the doings of men and cities outside Easterham; his knowledge widened slowly, for he had no brothers and was singularly innocent in the everyday sense of the word.

And all the time, during those Easterham days,

he was beginning to understand things. He saw that Beaver and Worthing, with their small salaries and narrow capacities, had not "Got On"—would never "Get On." He realized, too, that his father, well through life, had been little better than a man in the beginning of it. On the other hand, Bilson, with his large, shining shop, might be said to have "Got On," and just when he was half deciding that Bilson held the secret, Bilson suddenly went bankrupt, owing to the failure of some coffee plantations in Ceylon. It seemed a perplexing business, this getting on. Easier to talk about than to do. And, after all, the getting on-ness of Bilson had been circumscribed by the narrow area of Easterham. The real success meant power, and the ability to use it: wide power over the affairs of other people.

These were not the thoughts of a moment: they were lingering thoughts that spread over three years, from seventeen to twenty, those three years when he was at the *Easterham Gazette* office, with only Beaver and Worthing for his models in life.

They were thoughts in the intervals of writing "notes" on local subjects—indeed, the notes were the outcome of the thoughts—of reading, and of cycling, and going to the theatre. And then one day a most amazing thing happened.

Beaver Got On!

Yes, it was really incredible, but the fact was there indisputable and glaring. Beaver, shaggy and unkempt, who seemed to have settled down for ever to the meetings and the calls and the police-courts ("Harriet Higgins, 30, no fixed abode, charged with being drunk and disorderly, etc."), broke through the cobwebs that had settled on him, in an unexpected and definite manner.

He came to Humphrey one day and remarked quite casually, "I've given old Worthing the push."

Humphrey looked at him: he wore a Norfolk jacket, with old trousers, and a tweed hat of no shape at all. Beaver took his pipe out of his mouth, and Humphrey noticed the short nails on his stumpy, fat fingers. Beaver always bit his nails.

"I've given old Worthing the push," said Beaver. "Look at this." He showed a letter to Humphrey, who saw that it was from the "Special News Agency" of London, employing Beaver in their service at £2, 10s. a week.

"How did you get it?" Humphrey asked.

"Wrote in," said Beaver, gnawing a finger-tip. "Been writing in on the quiet for the last year. Fed up with old Worthing and filling up time at case."

"I thought you had to know how to write well if you wanted to work in London," Humphrey said. There were no illusions about Beaver's style.

"Oh! the Agency doesn't want writing—it wants a man who can take down shorthand verbatim. . . . I'm off next week," said Beaver.

Humphrey looked longingly at him and his letter, and then round at the whitewashed walls of the office, with its Calendars and local Directories for years past on the shelf, and the pile of *Gazettes* on the corner of the counter. Mr Worthing passed through the office, stopped, and scowled at Beaver.

"Kindly remove your head-gear in the front office," he said, and Beaver, with the unmurmuring discipline of years which nothing could break, took off the crumpled tweed thing he called a hat.

"Nice pig, isn't he?" Beaver said to Humphrey, as Worthing went out. "We had an awful row. Said I ought to have given him a month's notice. A week

would have been good enough for me if he was doing the sacking. Pig in knickers, that's what he is," said Beaver, defiantly. "This is a Hole."

"Oh, Beaver!" cried Humphrey, hopelessly. "It is a Hole. He *is* a Pig. . . . But what's going to happen to me?"

"You'll do my work," Beaver remarked.

"I can't write shorthand. Besides, I don't want to. How old are you, Beaver?"

"Just turned thirty. Why?"

"Thirty!" thought Humphrey; fancy Beaver having wasted all these years in doing nothing but local reporting. Would he have to work ten years more and still achieve nothing further than Beaver. There must be some way out of it. Beaver had found it, and surely he could.

"It's fine for you," Humphrey said, admiringly now, for, in the blankness of Beaver leaving the office where they had worked, he had forgotten to congratulate him. "The Special News Agency is the biggest in London, isn't it."

"Rather," said Beaver, comfortably. "It's a life job." That was his ambition. "Look here, young Quain, I think you're too good for Easterham, too. Those notes of yours, you know. . . . I used to read 'em every week. Not at all bad. . . . You take my tip, and do a turn at reporting for a while, and then when you've got the hang of things write in. Write in to all the London papers. Say you've had good provincial experience — 'provincial' sounds better than local. You'll see. You're bound to get replies. Say you're a good all-round man. Enclose a stamped envelope." Beaver sauntered to and fro, nibbling at a nail between excited sentences. "Oh, and don't you forget it. Write on *Easterham Gazette* notepaper."

And when, a week later, Beaver left, Worthing asked Humphrey to try his hand at the police-court, Humphrey accepted the inevitable, and tried to improve on the style of the police reports. Worthing swore at him, and rewrote them all, and told him to model his style on that of the late Mr Beaver.

Whereupon Humphrey, seeing that he would never Get On if he were to live in the shadow of Beaver, sat down, and "wrote in."

He wrote to *The Day*, because he bought the paper every morning, and thought it was wonderful.

The day that Ferrol's reply arrived was a day of triumph for Humphrey. The letter came to him with unbelievable promptness, asking him to call at the office. . . . Never again did Humphrey recapture the fine emotion that thrilled him as he read and re-read the letter. Looking back on it, he saw that those moments were among the most glorious in his life; he stood on the threshold of a world of promise and enchantment, suddenly revealed to him by this scrap of paper with *The Day* in embossed blue letters, surrounded by telephone numbers and telegraphic addresses of the great newspaper.

When he showed the letter to his aunt, she sighed in a tired way, and said unexpectedly: "I'm afraid you will never get on, Humphrey. You are too restless. I'm sure you would do better to remain with Mr Worthing. However. . . ." She very rarely finished her sentences.

Humphrey smiled. He saw himself marching to fortune; he was twenty, and it never occurred to him that he could fail.

IV

YOU may call Fleet Street what you like, but the secret of it eludes you always. It has as many moods as a woman: it is the street of laughter and of tears, of adventure and dullness, of romance and reality, of promise and lost hopes, of conquest and broken men. Into its narrow neck are crammed all the hurrying life, the passions, the eager, beating hearts, the happiness and the sorrow of the broad streets East and West that lead to it. There is something in this thin, crooked street, holding in its body the essence of the world, that clutches at the imagination, something in the very atmosphere surrounding it which makes it different from all the other streets that are walked by men.

The stones and the old timber of some of its buildings are like the yellow parchment of some ancient manuscript, scribbled with faded history. There are chop-houses, and taverns, where the wigged and knee-breeched Puffs sat writing their tit-bits of scandal for the fashionable intelligence of the day; where Addison and Steele tapped their snuff-boxes and planned their letters to Mr Spectator; or, further back in the years, Shakespeare himself went Strandwards from Blackfriars up the narrow street where the gabled houses leaned to one another. Look, you can almost see the ghosts of Fleet Street pacing out of the little courts and alleys that lie athwart the street: you know that massive bulk of a man, walking ponderously, in drab-coloured coat and knee-breeches, and rather untidy stockings above

his heavy, buckled shoes. He is in the street of a million words; other ghosts jostle him, and in the gallant company one sees Charles Dickens, dropping his manuscript stealthily into a dark letter-box, in a dark office, up a dark court; and all the dead men who have given their lives to the street, some of them foolishly wanton in wine—dead men shot in the wars, or burnt with fever, or wrecked with the struggle, come back . . . come back to Fleet Street, to look wistfully at the lit windows, and listen to the throbbing music of the presses.

It lures you like a siren, coaxing with soft promises of prizes to be wrested from it: you shall be the favoured of the gods, and you become Sisyphus, rolling his stone eternally, day after day. Here are the things of life that you covet, they shall be yours, says the Street: and you are Tantalus, reaching out everlastingly, and grasping nothing, until your heart is parched within you. You shall be strong and mighty, it says, sapping your strength like Delilah, until you pull down the pillars of hope, and fall buried beneath the reckless ruins of your career.

Once you have answered the voice of the siren, you are taken in the magic spell. Beat your breast, and exclaim in agony, but nothing will avail, for if you leave the Street, the quiet world will seem void for ever, and, as the ghosts burn backwards through space, so shall you return to the old agitations and longings.

This was the Street to which young Humphrey Quain came on a January morning, riding triumphantly on the top of an omnibus. As he passed the fantastic Griffin, with its open jaws and monstrous scaly wings, like a warder guarding those who would escape, Fleet Street seemed to be the Street of Conquest.

It was a rare, crisp day, with a touch of frost in the air, and the sun clear and high in the heavens, above the tangle of wires and cables that almost roofed the Street. The traffic was beating up and down, with frequent blocks, here and there, as a heavy hooded van staggered up from Whitefriars or Bouverie Street. It was nearly mid-day, and the light two-wheeled carts were pouring out of Shoe Lane, or coming from Salisbury Square with the early editions of the afternoon papers. Newsboys on bicycles, with sacks of papers swung over their backs, seemed to be risking their lives every moment as they flashed into the thick of the traffic, clinging to hansoms, and sliding between drays and omnibuses, out of the press, until they could get through the narrow neck of Fleet Street towards the West.

Humphrey breathed deeply as he looked about him: the names of the newspapers were blazoned everywhere. Heavens! what a world of paper and ink this was, to be sure. The doors, the windows and the letter-boxes bore the titles of newspapers—all the newspapers that were. Every room, on every floor, was inhabited by the representatives of some paper or other: on the musty top windows he could read the titles of journals in Canada and Australia; great golden letters bulged across the buildings telling of familiar newspapers. The houses were an odd mixture of modernity and antiquity, they jostled each other in their cramped space; narrow buildings squeezed between high, red offices with plate-glass windows, and over and above the irregular roofs the wires spread thin threads against the sky, wires that gave and received news from the uttermost ends of the earth.

The letters in white enamel or gold on the windows told of Paris and Berlin, of Rotterdam and Vienna; here they marked the home of a religious paper, there

the office of a trade paper, and hard by it *The Sportsman*, with its windows full of prize-fighters' photographs and a massive silver belt in a plush case, for the possession of which Porky Smith and Jewey Brown were coming to blows. Every branch of human activity, all the intricate complexities of modern life seemed to be represented either by a room or the fifth part of a room in Fleet Street.

And, rising out of the riot of narrow buildings, huddled closely to each other, the great homes of the daily papers stood up as landmarks. Here were the London offices of the important provincial papers, which spoke nightly with Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield and Liverpool—plate-glass windows and large letters gave them a handsome enough appearance, but they looked comparatively insignificant beside the tall red building of *The Sentinel*, and the new green-glazed establishment of *The Wire*, while the grey, enormous offices of *The Day* dwarfed them all. There was something solid about *The Day* as it stood four-square firmly in the Street, with its great letters sprawled across the front, golden by day, and golden with electric light in the night-time.

It seemed almost as if *The Day* had nudged the other great papers out of Fleet Street, for in the side streets, in Bouverie Street, and Whitefriars Street, and in Shoe Lane, the remainder of the London papers found their homes, with the exception of the high-toned *Morning Courier*, which found itself at the western end of the Street past the Law Courts.

But *The Day*, with its arrogant dome-tower (lit up at nights), its swinging glass doors and braided commissionaires, was the most typical of the modern newspaper world. It was just such a place as Humphrey Quain had dreamed. The swing doors

were always on the move; the people were coming and going quickly—here was action, and all the movement and the business of life.

For a few moments Humphrey hesitated a little nervously. He was a minute or two in advance of the time appointed for the interview, and he stood there, irresolute, filled with a wondrous sense of expectancy, among the crowd that hurried to and fro. He noticed on the other side of the road a bearded man, in a silk hat and a frayed overcoat, sitting on a doorstep at the top of Whitefriars Street. The man had a keen, intelligent face with blue eyes. It was the shiny silk hat that leapt to Humphrey's notice, it seemed so out of keeping with the rest of the man's clothes. Besides, why should a man in a silk hat sit on a doorstep. . . . Years later the man was still there, every day, sitting sphinx-like, surveying those who passed him . . . he must have marked their faces grow older.

The commissionaire regarded Humphrey critically. It was the business of the commissionaire in *The Day* office, especially, to be a judge of character. He divided callers into two main classes—those who wanted to see the editor, and those whom the editor wanted to see. The two classes were quite distinct, and there were few who, like Humphrey Quain, belonged to both.

"Yes, by appointment," said Humphrey, a little proudly, to the commissionaire's cold question that rose like a wall to so many callers.

He was shown into a little room, and made to fill up a form—name, address and business. The next minute a boy in a green uniform led him up a flight of stairs, through the ante-room where the pink-cheeked Trinder sat typewriting diligently, and so to Ferrol's room.

Humphrey had a confused impression of a broad,

high room, of a man sitting at a desk miles away at the farther end of the room by the half-curtained window; of red walls hung with files of newspapers, and the contents bills of that day; of a Louis XVI. clock, all scrolls and cupids, bringing a queer touch of drawing-room leisure with it; and of telephones and buttons that surrounded the man at the desk. The buttons fascinated him: he saw that thin slips of ivory labelled them with the names of the different departments—Editor, News-Editor, Reporters, Sub-Editors, Advertisement Manager, Business Manager, Literary Editor, Sporting Editor, City Editor, Foreign Editor — the whole of the building, with all its workers, seemed to be within the reach of Ferrol's fingers. He was like the captain of a great ship, navigating the paper from this room, steering daily through the perilous journey. Humphrey remembered afterwards how he was possessed with an odd longing; he wanted to see Ferrol press all the buttons at once, to hear the bones of the paper, the framework on which it was built up each day, come clattering and rattling into the room.

Ferrol looked up from his papers, pushed back his round, upholstered chair that tipped slightly on its axis, and the room with its red walls and carpet suddenly faded from Humphrey, and he became aware only of a face that looked at him . . . a masterful, powerful face, strong in every feature, from the thick, closely-knit eyebrows below the broad forehead, to the round, large chin. There was something insistent in this face of Ferrol, with its steel-coloured eyes, that hardened or softened with his moods, and its black moustache, that bulged heavily over his upper lip and gave him an appearance of rugged ferocity.

Humphrey felt as if he were a squirming thing under the microscope. . . . That was the way of Ferrol—

everything depended on the first impression that he received; all his being was tautened to receive that first impression. It was a narrow system of judging character, but he made few mistakes. . . . They were quickly corrected. He never forgave those who deceived him by wearing a mask over their true selves.

There is not the slightest doubt that Humphrey felt a little nervous — who would not, with Ferrol's eyes boring through one?—but he knew that great issues were at stake. He carried his head high, and his eyes met Ferrol's without a quiver. Thus he stood by the table for five seconds, though it seemed as many minutes to him, until Ferrol told him to sit down.

"So you want to come on *The Day*," was the way Ferrol began. They were eye to eye all the while.

"Yes, sir," said Humphrey, briskly. Somehow or other, with the sound of Ferrol's voice all his nervousness departed. It was the silence that had made him feel awkward.

"Let's see. . . . Ah! yes; you've been on an Easterham paper, haven't you?"

"Three years," Humphrey replied.

"That all the experience you've had?"

Humphrey smiled faintly. "That's all," he said.

"What do you want to do?"

Here was an amazing question for which he was totally unprepared. It had never occurred to him that he would be asked to make his choice. His eye wandered to the buttons. . . . What *did* he want to do? He made an answer that sounded futile and foolish to him.

"I want to get on," he stammered, hesitatingly, with a picture of his aunt rising mentally before him.

Ferrol's eyes twinkled. It was a magic answer if Humphrey had but known. Most of the others he saw

wanted to do descriptive writing, they had literary kinks in them, or wanted to have roving commissions abroad. . . . None of them wanted to start at the bottom.

"Well, this is the place for young men who want to get on, you know," said Ferrol. "It's hard work. . ." He turned away and consulted some papers. "I think I'll give you a chance," he said.

The clock struck twelve, and it sounded to Humphrey that a chime of joy-bells had flooded the room with triumphant music.

"When can you start?" Ferrol asked.

"Next week," Humphrey said.

"You can start at three pounds a week." Ferrol pressed a button. Trinder appeared. "Ask Mr Rivers if he can come," said Ferrol.

Humphrey thought only of three pounds a week . . . three pounds!

"I'll put you on the reporting staff," Ferrol remarked. Then he smiled. "We'll see how you get on. . . ." There was a pause. (Three pounds a week! Three pounds a week!)

He looked up as the door opened and saw an extraordinarily virile-looking person come into the room—a man with the face of a refined pugilist, with large square-shaped hands and an expression of impish perkiness in his eyes.

"Come in, Rivers," said Ferrol. "This is Mr Quain."

Mr Rivers shook his hand with an air of polite restraint. "Mr Rivers is our News Editor," explained Ferrol, and then to Rivers, "I have engaged Mr Quain for a trial month, Rivers."

Rivers smiled whimsically. "You're not a genius, I hope," he said to Humphrey. The spirit of humour that flashed across Rivers's face, twinkling his eyes and the

corners of his mouth and dimpling his cheeks, made Humphrey laugh a negative reply.

"That's all right," said Rivers, his face so creased in smiles until his beady eyes threatened to disappear altogether. "The last genius we had," he said, with a nod to Ferrol, "let us down horribly on the Bermondsey murder story."

The telephone bell rang. "I'll see him now," said Ferrol through the telephone, and Humphrey took that as a signal that the interview was ended. Ferrol shook hands with him, and once more he felt himself the target of those steel-grey eyes that held in them the stern remorselessness of strength.

"Good-looking young man," said Rivers, as the door closed behind Humphrey. "Hope he'll shape all right."

"I hope so," Ferrol echoed. . . . And he was glad that Rivers had praised Humphrey, for he was pleased with the upright, manly bearing of the lad, the quick intelligence of the face, and he had noticed the frank eyes, the smooth skin and the dark hair that had belonged in the lost years to Margaret.

V

HUMPHREY came downstairs and out into the street again walking like one in a dream. His interview with Ferrol had lasted barely five minutes, and in those few minutes the whole course of his future life had been determined. His mind was whirling with the suddenness of it all; whirling and whirling round one thought, the thought of three pounds a week. Round this pivot, as a catharine-wheel spins round its pin, the thing of the greatest import revolved brilliantly, shedding its luminous light far into the dark recesses of the future . . . he was on *The Day*. Fleet Street was at his feet.

In that moment a new Humphrey Quain was born, different from the youth who had walked a little timorously into Ferrol's room; he was no longer a lost cipher in the world, he was a unit in the army that marched forwards, with Progress and To-morrow for their watchwords. He felt, suddenly, a great man—Humphrey Quain of *The Day*, cocksure, self-confident, with ambitions that appalled him when he thought of them in after years.

What would Beaver say? What would old Worthing say. . .? And there was his aunt, too.

That man in the silk hat, with the shabby overcoat, was still sitting on the doorstep. As Humphrey passed him, his lips twisted in a haunting ironical smile. Perhaps he knew of Humphrey's thoughts.

He went back to Easterham. After all, Worthing took it very well, and his aunt agreed that three pounds a

week certainly showed that he was Getting On, and Beaver, to whom he wrote the glad news, recommended him rooms in Guilford Street, in the house where he was living.

And there followed days of tremendous dreams.

VI

A WEEK later a four-wheeler brought up outside No. 5A Guilford Street, and there, on the doorstep, was Beaver, with his thumbs inkier than ever, waiting to welcome Humphrey to London. The cabman, one of those red-faced, truculent individuals whom a petrol-driven Nemesis has now overtaken and rendered humble, demanded two shillings more than his fare, firstly, because it was obvious that Humphrey came from the country, and secondly, because he had gone by mistake to 550A, which was at the far end of the street.

"Why didn't you speak the number plainly," he growled.

They compromised with an extra sixpence, on the condition that the cabman should assist in carrying Humphrey's two trunks into the house, as far as the second-floor landing.

"There are your rooms," Beaver said, throwing open the door; "you've got a sitting-room, with a little bedroom at the side. Twelve shillings a week," he said, anxiously. "Not too much, I hope. Breakfasts, one shilling a day." He lowered his voice mysteriously. "Take my tip, Quain, and open the eggs and the window at the same time."

Humphrey laughed. It was jolly to have Beaver in the loneliness of London. This was quite another Beaver, a better-groomed Beaver, with a clean collar, and only one day's stubble on his chin. He made swift

calculations—twelve and seven—nineteen, and coals—what of coals?

Coals were a shilling a scuttle. Beaver confided to him that he had a regular system for checking the coal supply. It seems he made an inventory of every lump of coal in every fresh scuttleful. He kept a kind of day-book and ledger system of coal, debiting against the credit supply the lumps that he put on the fire, and balancing his books at night. In this way Mrs Wayzgoose, the landlady, found no opportunity for making extra capital out of the coal business.

"You're better off than I am," Beaver said. "I've only got the top room at eight shillings a week—a bed-sitting room. But then, I send ten shillings a week to my sister. It doesn't leave very much by the time I've had my meals and paid the rent."

Humphrey begged him to consider the sitting-room as his own, so long as he lived in the house. They began to unpack together, Beaver making exclamations of surprise at the turn of things.

"Fancy you being on *The Day!*" he said, pausing with a volume in each hand.

"It all happened so quickly. I took your advice. Ferrol seems a wonderful chap."

"Oh! I daresay Ferrol's all right . . . but *The Day's* got an awful reputation. They're always sacking somebody. . . . I'd rather be where I am. They've got to keep firing, you know. New blood, and new ideas. That's what they want."

Humphrey laughed. "I'm not afraid," he said. "Once I get my teeth into the place, they won't shake me off." All the same, it must be confessed that Beaver's words awoke a slight feeling of alarm in his heart. A king might arise who knew not Humphrey, and he might go down with the rest.

"We'll put the books on the mantelpiece; I'll have to get a book-shelf to-morrow." Humphrey had brought up a few of his favourites—an odd collection: *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's; The Time Machine; An Easy Outline of Evolution; Gulliver's Travels*, and *Captain Singleton;* the poems of Browning and Robert Buchanan, and Carlyle's *French Revolution.* The pictures they agreed to hang to-morrow. They were only heliogravure prints of the kind that were sold in shilling parts. Watts' "Hope" and "Life and Death," and other popular pictures, together with photographic reproductions of authors, ancient and modern, from *The Bookman.*

When they had finished, Humphrey surveyed his new home. It looked comfortable enough in the firelight, with the green curtains drawn over the windows. The furniture was of the heavy mahogany, mid-Victorian fashion, blended with a horsehair sofa and bent-wood arm-chair, that struck a jarring note of ultra-modernity. There was a flat-topped desk in one corner by the fireplace. The mantelpiece was hideous with pink and blue vases that held dried grass and clipped bulrushes. Looking round more carefully, he saw that Moses himself could not have had more bulrushes to screen him than Mrs Wayzgoose had put for the delight of her lodgers. There were bulrushes in the mirror over the sideboard, bulrushes in a gaily-decorated stand whose paint hid its drain-pipe pedigree, bulrushes in another bloated vase on a fretted ebony stand by the window. Who shall explain this extraordinary passion for bulrushes that still holds in its thrall the respectable landladies of England?

"I must have them cleared away," said Humphrey.

Beaver smiled. "You just try!" he said meaningly. "Anyhow, you're better off than I am, mine's paper fans."

He rang the bell, and a stout, placid-faced woman appeared at the door. She wore at her neck a large topaz-coloured stone, as large as a saucer, set in a circle of filigree gold, and heavy-looking lumps of gold dangled from her ears. Her hands, with their fingers interlocked, rested on the ends of the shawl that made her appear even more ample than she was.

"This is Mr Quain, Mrs Wayzgoose," said Beaver.

Mrs Wayzgoose's face fell apart in her welcoming smile—the smile that her lodgers saw only once. It was a wonderful, carefully-studied smile, beginning with the gradual creasing of the mouth, extending earwards, joyfully, and finally spreading until the nose and the eyes were brought into the scheme.

"I hope you find everything you want, Mr Quain," she said.

"Everything's very comfortable," Humphrey answered.

"Do you take tea or coffee with your breakfasts, Mr Quain?"

Humphrey was about to reply coffee, when the guardian Beaver winked enormously at him, and shook his head in a manner that was quite perplexing. He had not a notion of what Beaver was trying to convey —there was evidently something to beware of in the question. Then, he had an inspiration.

"What do I take, Beaver?" he asked.

"Oh, tea — undoubtedly tea," Beaver answered hastily.

"Very good." Mrs Wayzgoose turned to go.

"Oh! by the way, Mrs Wayzgoose," Humphrey said. "These . . . these bulrushes. . . ."

"*Bulrushes!*" echoed Mrs Wayzgoose, losing her placidity all of a sudden. There was an icy silence. Beaver seemed to be enjoying it.

"Pray, what of my bulrushes?" demanded the masterful Mrs Wayzgoose.

"Don't you think . . . I mean . . . wouldn't the room be lighter without them?"

"Without them?" The way she echoed his words, her voice rising in its scale, reminded him of the wolf's replies to Red Riding Hood before making a meal of her. "Are you aware, Mr Quain, that those bulrushes have been there for the last thirty years."

"I was not aware of it, but I am not surprised to hear it," Humphrey answered politely.

"And that never a complaint has been made about them."

"I *am* surprised to hear that," he murmured.

"The last gentleman who had these rooms," continued Mrs Wayzgoose, "he *was* a gentleman, in spite of being coffee-coloured, was a law student. Mr Hilfi Abbas. He took the rooms *because* of the bulrushes. Said they reminded him of the Nile. I could let these rooms over and over again to Egyptian gentlemen while these bulrushes are there. . . ." And with that she flounced out of the room in a whirl of skirts, with her ear-rings rocking to the headshakes which punctuated her remarks.

"There you are," said Beaver, as the door closed behind her. "What did I tell you?"

Humphrey laughed, and shook his fist at the offending bulrushes. "They'll go somehow, you see."

When all the unpacking was finished, the pipes put in the pipe-rack, the tobacco-jar on the table, and the photographs of his mother, his father and his aunt placed on the mantelpiece, the question of food came uppermost in his mind. Beaver told him that he had accepted an invitation to supper.

"I met a chap on a job whom I knew years ago.

We were both reporters together in Hull, on a weekly there. I didn't know you'd be coming up this evening or I wouldn't have arranged to go there."

"Well, it doesn't matter," said Humphrey. "I can manage for myself. Don't let me upset your arrangements."

"Look here," Beaver said suddenly. "Why shouldn't you come with me. It's only cold supper and they won't mind a bit. I'll explain things. Besides," he added, as he noticed Humphrey was hesitating, "Tommy Pride will be one of your new colleagues. He's on *The Day*. You might be able to pick up a few tips from him."

So Humphrey agreed, and they went up into Holborn. It was Sunday evening and every shop was shut, except an isolated restaurant and a tobacconist here and there. The public-houses alone were wholly open, and their windows radiated brilliance into the night. The East had invaded the West for its Sunday parade, and the streets were a restless procession of young people; sex called to sex without anything more evil in intention than a walk through the streets, a hand-clasp and, perhaps, a kiss in some by-way, and then to part with the memory of a gay adventure that would linger during the dull routine of the week to come, to be forgotten and replaced by another.

Beaver was for taking the "tube" to Shepherd's Bush—it was a new luxury for London then, making people wonder how they could have borne so long with the sulphurous smoke and gloom of the old underground railway — but the movement of the streets fascinated Humphrey, and, though the journey took much longer, they went out by omnibus.

Ah! that ride. . . . The first ride through London, when Humphrey felt the great buildings all around him, and above him, rising enormously in a long chain that

seemed to stretch for miles and miles, below the sky that was copper-tinted with the glare of thousands of lamps. What did London mean to him, then? He found his mind groping forwards and backwards, and this way and that way, puzzling for the secret of the real London that was hidden in the stones of it. He was a little afraid of it all, it seemed so vast and complicated. In Easterham, one knew every one, and to walk the streets was like walking the rooms of one's house—but here no man noticed another, one felt strange and outcast at first, intensely lonely, and minutely insignificant. Idly, as he looked down from this omnibus, at the people as they strolled up and down, he wondered of what they were thinking. Did they ever think at all, these people of the streets—did they ever have moments of meditation when they pondered the why and the wherefore of anything? It seemed so odd to Humphrey, as he thought of it—here was the centre of a great civilization, here were men and women, well and decently dressed, here was London broad and mighty, and yet the minds of those who walked below him were, he felt, narrow and pinched. They might have been living in Easterham for all their lives.

And, now, he felt afraid for the first time, knowing that he could never conquer these people by the path he had chosen. What mattered anything to them, except that it touched the root of their lives? They cared nothing, he knew, for the greatness of things. They talked vaguely of the greatness of Empire, but they never thought about it, nor understood it. They lived in a world of names—the world itself was nothing but a string of names which they had been taught. The very stars above them were just "Stars," and the word meant no more to them: if you had talked to them of infinite worlds beyond worlds, of other planets with suns

and moons and stars of their own, they would have winked an eye . . . and how, when they could not be conquered with the mightiness of everything about them, could Humphrey Quain hope to conquer them. For he had nothing beyond the desire to conquer them—a desire so strong, smouldering somewhere within him, that it had burnt up almost every other interest; he could think perhaps more deeply than they could, but for the rest, he was limited by lack of great knowledge, lack of everything, except an innate gift of shrewd observation and a power of intuitive reasoning.

Out of the mists of his thoughts, Beaver's voice came to him.

"There's the Marble Arch," said Beaver. "What have you been dreaming about? You haven't said a word all the time."

Humphrey laughed. "I was looking at the people," he said. "I always like looking at people."

They went past Hyde Park, with its naked trees showing like skeletons in the moonlight. The night seemed to deepen the spaciousness of the Park, with its shadows and silence; it held all the mystery and beauty of a forest. And later they passed the blue, far-reaching depths of Kensington Gardens, with the scent of trees and the smell of earth after rain coming to them.

It was all new to Humphrey, new and delightful. He promised himself glorious days and nights probing this city to its heart, and listening to the beat of its pulses. Already, for so was he fashioned, he began to note his emotions, and to watch his inner self, and the impressions he was receiving, so that he could write about them. This was the journalist's sense—a sixth sense—which urges its possessor to set down everything he observes, and adds an infinite zest to life, since every experience, every thought, every new feeling, means

something to write about. Nor did he think of the things he saw, in the way of the average man. He thought in phrases. It did not content him to feel that a street lamp was merely a lamp. He would ask himself, almost unconsciously, "What does it look like?" and search for a simile. His thoughts ran in metaphors and symbols. They swung into Notting Hill High Street, and here the streets were almost as crowded as those at Holborn, and the lights of the public-houses flared, oases of brilliance in the desert of dark, shuttered shops. And so down the hill to Shepherd's Bush, with its lamps twinkling round the green, and its throng of people—more men and women thinking of nothing at all, and going up and down in herds, like cattle.

VII

THE memory of that evening at the Prides remained with Humphrey. It was his first glimpse into the social life, and he saw a home that was wholly delightful. Beaver had not under-estimated the hospitality of the Prides. They gave him a hearty welcome that made him feel at home at once. Tommy Pride met them in the passage, and after the first introductions he led the way to the sitting-room, where Mrs Pride was waiting. She was a woman of forty, buxom and charming. He saw, within a very few minutes, that her admiration of Tommy Pride knew no bounds, that she thought him splendid and flawless—that much he read from the way her brown eyes lit up when she gazed upon him, and the fond smile that marked her lips when she spoke to him.

The sitting-room was not a very large apartment, but it was furnished with unusual taste. There were books set in white enamelled bookcases—books that are permanent on the shelf, and not novels of a moment. There was chintz on the arm-chairs and green curtains hung over the window, and a few original black-and-white drawings and water-colours on the walls, papered in dark blue. The impression that the room gave to the visitor was one of peace and rest.

Humphrey was frankly disappointed in Tommy Pride. He had had a vague notion that everybody connected with a London newspaper was, of necessity, a person of fame. He knew the names of those who signed the articles in *The Day*, and he imagined he

would find himself in the company of the great immortals. Somehow or other it had never crossed his mind that there were patient, toiling men—hundreds of them—who put out their best work day after day, year after year, without any hope of glory or fame, but simply for the necessities of life, as a bricklayer lays bricks—hundreds of men quite unknown outside the bounds of Fleet Street and the inner newspaper world.

"Well," Mrs Pride said to him; "so you're going to try your luck in London, Mr Quain?"

Humphrey nodded, and the conversation went into the channels of small talk. Beaver and he amused the Prides with recollections of Easterham and Mr Worthing, and Tommy Pride capped their recollections with some of his own.

"When I was on a little local paper once, we had a fellow named Smee, who thought he could write," said Tommy. "The editor was a hard, cruel sort of chap, without any sympathy for the finer side of literature—at least that was what Smee said. He used to sob all round the place, because he wanted to write great throbbing prose instead of borough-council meetings. One day Smee got his chance. The editor was ill, and there was a prisoner to be hanged in the county jail. Smee wrote the effort of his life. It went something in this way:—

"'Last Tuesday, under the blue vault of heaven, when the larks were singing their rhapsodies to the roseate dawn, at 8 A.M., like a sudden harbinger of horror, the black flag fluttered above the prison walls, showing that Alfred Trollop, aged forty-two, labourer, had suffered the last penalty of the law—viz., death.'"

"How's that for descriptive?" asked Tommy, smacking his lips. "'Viz., death.' A glorious touch, eh?" He leaned towards Humphrey. "Don't you bother about

fine writing, Quain, or you'll break your heart. We keep a stableful of fine writers, and turn 'em loose when we want any high falutin' done."

"Don't be so depressing, Tommy," Mrs Pride said. "Never mind what he says, Mr Quain—there's a chance for every one to do his best in Fleet Street."

"Dear optimistress," remarked Tommy, linking an arm in hers, "let's see what we have for supper."

They all went into the dining-room, and Humphrey was given the place of honour next to Mrs Pride. Beaver sat opposite, and Tommy was at the head of the table carving the joint of cold roast beef. "I'm a little out of form," he said, whimsically. "This is the first meal I've had at home for a week."

"I sometimes wish Tommy were a sub-editor," Mrs Pride confided to Humphrey; "then we should at least have the day to ourselves. But he says he could never sit down at a desk for eight hours a night."

"Not me," Tommy interposed, with his mouth full of beef. "If they want to make you a sub-editor, Quain, take several grains of cyanide of potassium rather than yield. You've got some freedom of thought and life as a reporter, but if you're a sub you're chained down with a string of rules. They make you wear a mental uniform."

"I thought a sub-editor held a more important position than a reporter," Humphrey said.

"So he does, only the reporters don't think so. The paper couldn't get on without the sub-editors. I should love to see *The Day* printed for just one issue with everything that the reporters wrote untouched. It would have to be a forty-two page paper. Because every reporter thinks his story is the best, and writes as much of it as he can. . . . I like the subs, they've saved my life over and over again. Next to the Agency men,

they're the most useful people in the world, eh, Beaver? . . . Have some beer, Beaver. Pass him the jug, Quain."

Beaver laughed. "It strikes me you people on the regular staff of the papers take yourselves much too seriously. You've all got swelled heads. For the sake of fine phrases you'll lose half the facts. Why don't you all understand that it's simply in the day's work to do your job and forget all about it."

"Lord knows," Tommy replied, "but we don't. We get obsessed with our jobs, and dream them, and spend hours taking trouble over them, and we know all the time that when they come cold and chilly at night through the sub's hands, they're lopped about and cut up to fit a space. We may pretend we don't care what happens to our writing, so long as we draw our money, but I think we all do in our secret hearts. We're born that way. The moment a man really doesn't care whether his story is printed or cut to shreds, he's no good in a newspaper office. It means he's lost his enthusiasm."

Tommy's voice fell. He knew well enough that that was the state of affairs to which he had come. All the long, long years of work had left him emotionless. He had exhausted his enthusiasm, and the whole business seemed stale to him. He felt out of place in this new world of newspaperdom, peopled with energetic, hopeful young men who came out of nowhere, and captured at once the prizes which were so hardly won in his day. He felt himself being nudged out of it all, by the pushful enthusiastic army of young men who had marched down on Fleet Street. All round him he saw signs of the coming change—the old penny papers were talking of changing their price to a halfpenny; the older men in journalism were being pensioned off, or dismissed, or

"put on space"—which means that they were not paid a regular salary but at so much a column for what they wrote. The spirit of change was working everywhere: some of the solid writers who found that they could not comply with the modern demands of journalism, migrated back to the provinces and became editors or leader-writers on papers in Manchester, Birmingham or Sheffield. And, at the back of all this change, the figure of Ferrol hovered. . . . Ferrol sweeping irresistibly over the old traditions of Fleet Street. . . . Ferrol threatening to acquire this paper and that paper, to start weeklies and monthlies, to extend his power even to the provinces, so that everywhere the shadow brooded.

And they would want young men, keen, shrewd young men, and so the day would come when he would fade away from the life of Fleet Street. And then—

"Tommy and I are going to retire soon," Mrs Pride said, with a fond glance at her husband, "aren't we, Tommy?"

"She means to the workhouse, Beaver," Tommy remarked, with a grin.

"We're going to have a cottage in the country, and Tommy's going to write his book."

"No," said Beaver, incredulously.

"Do you write books, Mr Pride?" Humphrey asked.

"I? Lord, no! Not now. I once had an idea of writing books. I was just about your age. I believe I've even got the first chapter somewhere. But I've never written it. Whenever the missis and I get very depressed, we cheer ourselves up by talking of that book, and writing it in the country. By the way, do you know that deep down in the heart of every newspaper man there's a longing to write one book, and to live on two pounds a week in the country?"

"That'll do, Tommy," Mrs Pride interposed. "I won't have you spoil Mr Quain's evening any more. You're making him quite depressed. Don't pay any attention to him, Mr Quain, and have some cheese."

After supper they went back to the sitting-room, and Mrs Pride played to them, and Beaver sang in a shaky bass voice. Humphrey had never heard Beaver sing before. There was something grotesque about the singing. It took Humphrey by surprise. Beaver was the sort of man who, somehow or other, one imagined would sing in a high treble. He sang on and on, right through the portfolio of the "World's Favourite Songs," including "The Anchor's Weighed," "John Peel," "The Heart Bowed Down," and the rest of them. Pride sat in the arm-chair by the fireside, smoking a pipe, and nodding to the old melodies, while Humphrey gravitated to the book-shelves, and looked at some of the books.

He seemed to have left Easterham and his aunt far behind him in dim ages. A new feeling of responsibility came over him, as he sat there thinking of the morrow when his battle with Fleet Street was to begin. The future rested with him alone, and it gave him a delicious thrill of individuality to think of it.

It was as if he had suddenly become merged with some one else within him, who was constantly saying to him: "You are Humphrey Quain. . . . You are Humphrey Quain. Take charge of yourself now. . . . I have finished with you." He had an odd sense of not fully knowing this strange new Self with which he was faced. He wondered, too, whether Beaver or Pride had ever passed through the same sensation that was passing through him now. This was the beginning of that introspection when the presence of his Self became

dominant in his mind, shaping as something to be looked at and examined and questioned, that was to lead to much bitterness and unhappiness in the years to come.

The evening came to an end, but before they left Pride took Humphrey aside. "Beaver said you might like a few hints," he said. "I don't think I can help you much. I think you know your way about. But there are two important things to remember: Don't be a genius, and don't be a fool. I'll tell you more in the morning."

On the way back to Guilford Street Beaver eulogized Pride. He was one of the best reporters in Fleet Street —one of the safest, Beaver meant. Never let his paper down. Worth his salary on any paper.

"I suppose he gets a pretty big salary?" Humphrey asked.

"Who? Pride — no! I don't think he gets very much. He's not a show man, you see. Of course, dear old Tommy hasn't got a cent to spare. He's got a girl of thirteen at boarding-school, and that takes a good bit of keeping up."

"Why was he so discouraging?"

"Oh! that's his way. He pretends he's a pessimist."

Humphrey went to bed that night full of thoughts of the morning. And in the tumult of his thoughts he wondered how he should avoid becoming as Tommy Pride, with all his thirty years of work as nothing, and all the high ambitions sacrificed to Fleet Street. Was that to be his end too—a reporter for ever, and at the finish of it, nothing but the husks of enthusiasm. He thought of Pride's wistful desire for a cottage in the country and two pounds a week. And he fell asleep while thinking how he was going to find a better end to his work than that.

PART II

LILIAN

I

HUMPHREY QUAIN came into the office of *The Day* with the greatest asset a journalist can possess—enthusiasm. There is no other profession in the world that calls so continually, day after day, for enthusiasm. The bank-clerk may have his slack moment in adding up his figures—indeed the work has become so mechanical to him that he can even think of other things while making his additions; the actor, even, has his lines by heart, and can sometimes go automatically through his part, without the audience noticing he is listless; the barrister may lose his case; the artist may paint one bad picture—it is forgotten in the gallery of good ones; but the reporter must be always alert, always eager, always ready to adapt himself to circumstances and persons, and fail at the peril of his career. In large things and small things it is all alike: the man who goes to report a meeting must do it as eagerly and with as much enthusiasm as the man who journeys to Egypt to interview the Khedive.

And, as Humphrey soon found, every day and every hour there are forces conspiring to kill this eagerness and enthusiasm at the root. Before he had been a week on *The Day* he began to realize the forces that were up against him. It seemed that there was a deliberate league on the part of the world to stifle his ambitions, and to make things go awry with him. Before he had been a week on *The Day* he felt that he was being checked and thwarted by people. He was turned from the doorsteps by the footmen and servants of those whom he went to see on some quite trivial matters; or

he could never find the man he went forth to seek. He went from private house to office, from office to club, in search of a city magnate one day, and failed in his quest, and, after hours of searching, he came back to *The Day* empty-handed, and Rivers said brusquely: "You'll have to try again at dinner-time. He's sure to be home at seven. We've got to have him to-night." And so he went again at seven to the man's house, only to find that he was dining out and would not be back until eleven. Whereupon he waited about patiently, and, finally, when he did return home, the city magnate declined to venture any opinion on the subject in question to Humphrey (it was about the Russian loan), and, after all, he came back, late and tired, to the office, to find that, as far as Selsey, the chief sub-editor, was concerned, nobody cared very much about his failure or not.

And, in the morning, his struggles and troubles and the difficulty of yesterday was quite forgotten, and Rivers never even mentioned the matter to him. But if *The Sentinel*, or any other paper, had chanced to find the city magnate in a more relenting mood, and had squeezed an interview out of him . . . !

He was given cuttings from other papers, pasted on slips of paper, and told to inquire into them. They led him nowhere. There would be, perhaps, an interview with some well-known person of European interest visiting London, but the printed interview never said where the well-known person was to be found. And so this meant a weary round of hotels, and endless telephone calls, until the hours passed, and Humphrey discovered that the man had left London the night before. Even though that was no fault of his own, he could not eliminate the sense of failure from his mind.

And once, Rivers had told him to go and see Cartwright's, the coal-merchants, in Mark Lane, and get from them some facts about the rise in the price of coal.

And he had been shown into the office, and Cartwright had talked swiftly, hurling technical facts and figures at him, as though he had been in the coal business all his life. So that when the interview was ended, Humphrey reeled out of the office, his mind and memory a tangle of half-understood facts, and wholly incapable of writing anything on the matter. Fortunately, when he got back, he found that other reporters had been seeing coal-merchants, and all that was wanted was just three lines from each—an expression of opinion as to whether the high price would last—and Humphrey rescued from the tangle of talk Cartwright's firm belief that the rise was only temporary.

Another day he had been sent to interview a Bishop —an authority on dogma, whose views were to be asked on a startling proposition (from America) of bringing the Bible up-to-date. The Bishop received Humphrey coldly in the hall of his house, and Humphrey noticed that the halls were hung with many texts reflecting Christian sentiments of love and hope and brotherhood. And the Bishop, unmoved by Humphrey's rather forlorn appearance, for somehow he quailed before the austere gaitered personage, curtly told him that he could not discuss the matter.

When Humphrey came back it so happened that he met Neckinger. "Well, what are you doing to-day, Quain?" asked Neckinger with an indulgent smile. He was a short, thick-set man, with a pear-shaped face, and brown eyes that held a quizzical look in them. It was the second time Humphrey had come into touch with Neckinger, who was the editor of *The Day*, and rarely ventured from his room when he came to the office. Humphrey told him where he had been, and with what results.

"Wouldn't he talk?" asked Neckinger.

"No," Humphrey answered.

Neckinger paused with his hand on the door knob. His eyes twinkled, and his fingers caressed his moustache. "Why didn't you make him talk?" asked Neckinger with a hint of disapproval in his voice. Then, without waiting for a reply, he went into his room.

Humphrey felt that he was faced with a new problem in life. How did one *make* people talk? It was not enough to hunt your quarry to his lair—that was the easiest part of the business—you had to compel him to disgorge words—any words—so be they made coherent sentences. You had to come back and say that he had spoken, and write down what he said at your discretion. And if he would not speak, you had, in some mysterious manner, to force the words from his mouth. That was what puzzled Humphrey in the beginning. What was the magic key that the other reporters had to unlock the conversation of those whom they went to see? They very seldom failed. Humphrey went home, perplexed, disturbed with this added burden on his shoulders. He saw his life as one long effort at making unwilling people talk for publication.

And yet, on the whole, this first week of his in Fleet Street was one of glorious happiness. The romance of the place gripped him at once, and held him a willing captive. He loved the thrill of pride that came to him, whenever he passed through the swing doors in the morning, and the commissionaire, superior person of impregnable dignity, condescended to nod to him. He loved the reporters' room, with its fire and the grate, and the half circle of chairs drawn round it, where there were always two or three of the other men sitting, and talking wonderful things about the secrets of their work.

In reality, the reporters' room was the most prosaic room in the whole building. It was a broad, bare room, excessively utilitarian in appearance. There was nothing superfluous or ornamental in it. Everything within its

four walls was set there for a distinct purpose. The large high windows were uncurtained so as to admit the full light of day. And when the full light of day shone, it showed an incredibly untidy room, with every desk littered with writing-paper, and newspapers, and even the floor thick with a slipshod carpet of printed matter. The desks were placed against the walls and round the room. Humphrey had no desk of his own. He usually came in and sat at whichever desk was empty, and more often than not the rightful owner of the desk would arrive, and Humphrey would mumble apologies, gather up his papers, and depart to the next desk. In this way he sometimes made a whole tour of the room, shifting from desk to desk.

There were pegs near the door, and from one of them a disreputable umbrella dangled by its crook handle. It was pale-brown with dust, and its ribs were bent and broken, and rents showed in the covering—as an umbrella its use had long since gone, yet it still hung there. Nobody knew to whom it belonged. Nobody threw it away—it was a respected survival of some ancient day. It remained for ever, an umbrella that had once done good and faithful work, now useless and dusty, with its gaping holes and twisted framework—perhaps, as a symbol.

A telephone, a bell that rang in the commissionaire's box and told him the reporter needed a messenger-boy, and a pot of paste completed the furniture of the reporters' room. They had all they needed, and if they wished for anything they could ring for it—that was the attitude of the managerial side who were responsible for office luxuries. The manager, by the way, had a room that was, by comparison, a temple of luxury, from its soft-shaded electric lights and green wall-paper (the reporters' walls were distempered) to its wondrous carpet, and mahogany desk. Nobody seemed to care very much for the reporters, Humphrey found, except when one of them

—or all of them—saved the paper from being beaten by its rivals, or caused the paper to beat its rivals. But in the ordinary course of events, the manager ignored the reporters; the sub-editors, in their hearts, regarded them as loafers and pitied their grammar and inaccuracy for official titles and initials of leading men; Neckinger never bothered much about them unless there was trouble in the air, while those distant people, the leader-writers, sometimes looked at them curiously, as one regards strange types. And yet, the reporters were the friendliest and most human of all those in the office. They came daily into contact with life in all its forms, and it knocked the rough edges off them. They were generous, large-hearted men, whose loyalty to their paper had no limits. They lived together, herded in their big bare room, chafing always against their slavery, and yet loving their bondage, unmoved at the strange phases of life that passed through their hands; surveying, as spectators regard a stage-play, the murders, the humours, the achievements, the tragedies, and the sorrow and laughter of nations.

In those days the interior of the grey building was an unexplored mystery for Humphrey. He passed along the corridors by half-opened doors which gave a tantalizing glimpse into the rooms beyond where men sat writing. There were the sporting rooms, where the sporting editor and his staff worked at things quite apart from the reporters. Nothing seemed to matter to them: the greatest upheavals left their room undisturbed; football, cricket, racing, coursing and the giving of tips were their main interests, and though a king died or war was declared, they still held their own page, the full seven columns of it, so that they could chronicle the sport and the pleasure. The sporting men and the reporters seldom mingled in the office; sometimes Lake, the sporting editor, nodded to those he knew coming up the

stairs. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a heavy face, and the appearance of a clubman and a man of the world.

Close to the sporting room was a strange room lit with an extraordinarily luminous pale blue glare. Humphrey satisfying his curiosity prowled about the building one evening, and ventured to the door. The men who were there did not question his presence. They just looked at him and went on with their work. One of them, in his shirt-sleeves and a black apron, was holding a black square of glass to the light, from which something shining was dripping. A pungent smell of iodoform filled Humphrey's nostrils. He knew the smell; it was intimately associated with the recollections of his youth, when he had dabbled in photography with a low-priced camera, using the cistern-room at the top of the house as a dark-room. And he saw that another man was manipulating an enormous camera, that moved along a grooved base. This, he knew, was an enlarging apparatus, and he realized that here they were making the blocks for *The Day*—transferring a drawing or a photograph to copper or zinc plates.

There was something real and vital about this office where each day was active with a different activity from the day before; where each room was a mirror of life itself.

Next door to the room where the blue light vibrated and flared intensely, he found a smaller room, where two men sat, also in their shirt-sleeves, tap-tapping at telegraph transmitters. A cigarette dangled loosely from the lip of each man, and neither of them glanced at the work of his fingers. They looked always at the printed proof, or the written copy held in a clip before them. This was the provincial wire room. They were tapping a selection of the news, letter by letter, to Birmingham, where *The Day* had an office of its own. Humphrey

noticed with a queer thrill that one of the men was sending through something that he himself had written.

Downstairs, in a long room, longer than the reporters' room, and just as utilitarian, the sub-editors sat at two broad tables forming the letter T. Mr Selsey, the chief sub-editor, sat in the very centre of the top of the T, surrounded by baskets, and proofs, and telephones, and, at about seven o'clock every evening, his dinner. He was a gentle-mannered man, whose face told the time as clearly as a clock. From six to eight it was cheerful; when he began to frown it was nine o'clock; when he grew restless and spoke brusquely it was eleven; and when his hair was dishevelled and his eyes became anxious it was eleven-thirty, and the struggle of pruning down and rejecting the masses of copy that passed through his hands was at its climax. At one o'clock he was normal again, and became gentle over a cup of cocoa.

Humphrey was never certain whether Mr Selsey approved of him or not. He had to go through the ordeal every evening of bringing that which he had written to him, and to stand by while it was read. It reminded him of his school-days, when he used to bring his exercise-book up to the schoolmaster. Selsey seldom made any comment—he read it, marked it with a capital letter indicating whether its fate would be three lines, a paragraph, or its full length, and tossed it into a basket, whence it would be rescued by one of the sub-editors, who saw that the paragraphs, the punctuation and the sense of it were right, cut out whole sentences if it were necessary to compress it, and added a heading to it. Then, it was taken back to Selsey, who glanced at it quickly, and threw it into another basket, whence it was removed by a boy and shot through a pneumatic tube to the composing-room.

The sub-editors' room was the heart of the organism

of *The Day* between the hours of six in the evening and one the next morning. It throbbed with persistent business. The tape machines clicked out the news of the world in long strips, and boys stood by them, cutting up the slips into convenient sizes, and pasting them on paper.

The telephone bells rang, and every night at nine-thirty, Westgate, the leather-lunged sub-editor, disappeared into a telephone-box with a glass door. Humphrey saw him one night when he happened to be in the room. He looked like a man about to be electrocuted, with a band over the top of his skull, ending in two receivers that fitted closely over his ears. His hands were free so that he could write, and through the glass Humphrey watched his mouth working violently until his face was wet with perspiration. He was shouting through a mouthpiece, and his words were carried under the sea to Paris, though no one in the sub-editors' room could hear them, since the telephone-box was padded and noise-proof.

And Humphrey could see his pencil moving swiftly over the paper, with an occasional pause, as his mouth opened widely to articulate a question, and again he felt that delightful and mighty sensation of being in touch with the bones of life, as he realized that somewhere, far away in Paris, the correspondent of *The Day*, invisible but audible, was hailing the sub-editors' room across space and time.

He saw no longer the strained, taut face of Westgate, his unkempt moustache bobbing up and down with the movement of his upper lip, the big vein down his forehead bulging like a thick piece of string with his perspiring exertions. He saw a miracle, and it filled his heart with a strange exultation. He wanted to say to Selsey, "Isn't that splendid!"

Six other men sat at the long table that ran at right

angles to the top table, and Selsey was flanked by Westgate, who dealt with Paris, and Tothill, who did the police-court news,—the stub of a cigarette stuck on his lower lip as though it were some strange growth. These men, in the first few days of Humphrey's life in the office of *The Day*, were incomprehensible people to him. He could not understand why they should elect, out of all the work in the world, to sit down at a table from six until one; to leave their homes—he assumed that they were comfortable—their firesides and their wives. They did not meet life as the reporters did; they had none of the glamour and the adventure of it, the work seemed to him to be unutterably stale and destructive. One or two of them wore green shades over their eyes to protect them from the glare of white paper under electric light. And the green shades gave their faces an appearance of pallor. They looked at him curiously whenever he came into the room: he divined at once, rightly or wrongly, that their interests clashed with his. They were one of their forces which he knew he would have to fight.

The remembrance of Tommy Pride's words echoed in his ears as he stood by Selsey's table.

Yet this room held him spell-bound as none other did. It was the main artery through which the life-blood of *The Day* flowed. He saw the boys ripping open the russet-coloured envelopes that disgorged telegrams from islands and continents afar off; he saw them sorting out stacks of tissue paper covered with writing, "flimsy"—manifolded copy—from all the people who lived by recording the happenings of the moment—men like Beaver, who were lost if people did not do things—the stories of people who brought law-suits, who were born, married, divorced; who went bankrupt; who died; who left wills; stories of actors who played parts; of books that were written; of men who made speeches; of

banquets; of funerals—the little, grubby boys were handling the epitome of existence, and this great volume of throbbing life was merely paper with words scrawled over it to them. . . . It was only in after years that Humphrey himself perceived the significance and the meaning of the emotions which swelled within him during those early days. At the time, as he glanced left and right, down the long table, where the sub-editors bent their heads to their work, and he saw this man dealing with the city news, making out lists of the prices of stocks and shares, and that man handling the doings of Parliament, something moved him inwardly to smile with a great, unbounded pride. He was like a recruit who has been blooded. "I, too, am part of this," he thought. "And this is part of me."

Yet another glimpse he had into the mysteries of the grey building, and then he marvelled, not that the small things he wrote were cut down, but that they ever got into print at all.

It was one night when he had been sent out on a late inquiry. A "runner"—one of those tattered men, who run panting into newspaper offices at night with news of accidents or fires—had brought in some story of an omnibus wreck in Whitehall. Humphrey was given a crumpled piece of paper, with wretchedly scrawled details on it, and told to go forth and investigate. Had he not been so new to the game, he would have known that it was wise to telephone to Charing Cross or Westminster hospitals, for the deductive mind of a reporter used to such things would have told him that where there is an omnibus wreck, there must be injury to life and limb, and the nearest hospitals would be able to verify the bald fact of an accident. But there was nobody who had sufficient leisure or inclination to teach Humphrey his business, and, perhaps it was all the better for him

that he should buy his lessons with experience. For he found that "runners'" tales, though they must be investigated, seldom pay for the investigation. The "runner" exaggerates manfully for the sake of his half-crown. Thus, when he arrived at Whitehall, he found, by the simple expedient of asking the policeman on point dûty, that there had been an accident—most decidedly there had been an accident; one wheel had come off an omnibus. When? "Oh, about three hours ago, but nobody was hurt as I know on. You can go back and tell 'em there's nothing in it for the noosepaper."

Humphrey had never said that he was a reporter: how did the policeman know? He was a good-natured, red-faced man, and his attitude towards Humphrey was one of easy-going familiarity and gentle tolerance. He spoke kindly as equal to equal; it might almost be said that, from his great height, he bent down, as it were, to meet Humphrey, with the air of a patron conferring benefits. He was not like the Easterham policemen who touched their hats to Humphrey, and called him "sir," because they knew whenever anything happened, the *Gazette* would refer to the plucky action of P.C. Coles, who was on point duty at the time.

"Nobody hurt at all!" Humphrey repeated, looking vaguely round in the darkness, as though he expected to see the wooden streets of Whitehall littered with bleeding corpses to give the constable the lie.

"You go 'ome," said the policeman, kindly. "I should be the first to know of anything like that if it was serious. I'd have to put in my report. I ain't got no mention of no one injured seriously."

He said it with an air of finality, as though he were taking upon himself the credit of having saved life and limb by not using his notebook. And with that, he eased the chin-strap of his helmet with his forefinger,

nodded smilingly, repeated, "You go 'ome," and padded riverwards in his rubber-soled boots.

When Humphrey got back to the office and into the sub-editors' room to tell his news, he found that their work was slackening. Two or three of them were hard at it, but the rest were having their supper. A tall, spidery-looking man, with neatly parted fair hair and a singularly high forehead, was tossing for pennies with Westgate—and winning. It was midnight. One of the sub-editors said to Humphrey:

"You'd better tell Selsey; he's in the composing-room." Humphrey hesitated.

"It's across the corridor," his informant added.

He went across the corridor, and into a new world. The room was alive with noise; row upon row the aproned linotype operators sat before the key-boards translating the written words of the "copy" before them into leaden letters. Their machines were almost human. They touched the keys, as if they were typewriting, and little brass letters slipped down into a line, and then mechanically an iron hand gripped the line, plunged it into a box of molten lead, and lifted it out again with a solid line of lead cast from the mould, while the little brass letters were hoisted upwards and distributed automatically into their places, and all the time the same business was being repeated again and again. The lines of type were set up in columns, seven of them to a page, and locked in an iron frame, and then they were taken to an inner room, where men pressed papier mâché over the pages of type, so that every letter was moulded clearly on this substance. Then this "flong" was placed in a curved receptacle, and boiling lead was poured upon it, as on a mould, so that one had the page curved to fit the cylinder of the printing machine. The curved sheet went through various phases of trimming and making ready, until it was finally taken to the basement. . . .

Very many brains were working together that the words written by Humphrey should be repeated hundreds and thousands of times. All these men were part of the mighty scheme. They had their homes and their separate lives outside the big building, but here they were all merged into one disciplined body, for so many hours at night, carrying on the work which the men on the other side did during the day.

In one corner of the room Selsey was busy with Hargreave, the assistant night editor, and as Humphrey went up he saw that they were still cutting out things from printed proofs, and altering headings. And on an iron-topped table great squares of type rested—the forms just as he had seen them in the *Easterham Gazette* office—only they were bigger, and the "furniture"—the odd wedge-shaped pieces of wood which they used in Easterham to lock the type firmly in between the frames, was abandoned for a simpler contrivance in iron. And there were Selsey and Hargreave peering at the first pages of *The Day* in solid type, reading it from right to left, as one reads Hebrew, and suddenly Hargreave would say: "Well we'd better take out the last ten lines of that, and shift this half-way down the column, and put this Reuter message at the top with a splash heading," or else, putting a finger on a square of type, "take that out altogether, that'll give us room." And he would glance up at the clock, with the anxiety of a man who knows there are trains to catch.

No question of writing here. . . . No time for sentiment. . . . No time to think, "Poor devil, those ten lines cost, perhaps, hours of work," or, "Those ten lines were thought by their writer to be literature." Literature be hanged! It was only cold type, leaden letters squeezed into square frames—leaden letters that will be melted down on the morrow—type, and the whole paper to be printed, and trains for the delivery carts to catch, if

people would have papers before breakfast. And the aproned men brought other squares of type, and printed rough impressions of them, so that Humphrey caught a glimpse of one of the pages at shortly after midnight of a paper that would be new to people at eight o'clock the next morning. He felt the pride of a privileged person.

Selsey caught sight of him. "Hullo, Quain . . . what are you doing here?"

"Bus accident—" began Humphrey.

Hargreave pounced upon him. "Any good? Is it worth a contents bill?" he asked, excitedly.

"There hasn't been any accident worth speaking of. No one hurt, I mean."

"All right. Let it go," said Selsey, calmly. Hargreave went away to haggle with the foreman over something. Nobody was relieved to hear that the accident had not been serious.

Humphrey lingered a little longer: he saw rooms leading out of the composing-room, where there was a noise of hammering on metal, and the smell of molten lead, . . . and men running to and fro in aprons, taking surreptitious pinches of snuff, banging with mallets, carrying squares of type, proofs, battered tins of tea, . . . running to and fro, terribly serious and earnest, just as scene-shifters in the theatre rush and bustle and carry things that the audience never sees, when the curtain hides the stage.

"Better get home," said Selsey, noticing him again.

Humphrey went downstairs. The reporters' room was empty; the fire was low in the grate. He went downstairs, and as he reached the bottom step, the grey building shivered and trembled as if in agony, and there came up from the very roots of its being a deep roar, at first irregular, and menacing, but gradually settling down to a steady, rhythmical beat, like the throbbing of thousands of human hearts.

II

THE man whom Humphrey feared most, in those early days, was Rivers, the news-editor. His personality was a riddle. You were never certain when you were summoned to his room in the morning, whether good or ill would result from it. In his hands lay the ordering of your day. You had no more control over your liberty from the time you came into Rivers' room than a prisoner serving his sentence,—no longer a man with a soul, but a reporter. You could be raised into the highest heaven or dropped down to the deepest hell by the wish of Rivers. He could bid you go forth—and you would have to tramp wretchedly the streets of the most unlovely spots in outer London in an interminable search for some elusive news: or perhaps you would be given five pounds for expenses and told to catch the next train for a far county, and spend the day among the hedgerows of the country-side. He had power absolute, like the task-masters of old.

He sat in his room, with the map of England on the wall with its red flags marking the towns where *The Day* had correspondents, surrounded by telephones and cuttings from papers. He was in the office all day and night. At least that was how it appeared to Humphrey, who met him often and at all times on the stairs. When he was not, by any chance, there, his place was taken by O'Brien, an excitable Irishman, whose tie worked itself gradually up his collar, marking the time when his excitement was at fever-heat like a barometer.

Rivers had a home, of course, and a wife and a family. He was domesticated somewhere out in Herne Hill, from

the hours of eight until ten-thirty in the morning ; and except once a week no more was seen of him at home. O'Brien generally took the desk on Sundays. But for the rest of his life Rivers lived and breathed with *The Day* more than any one else. From the time the door closed on him after breakfast, to the time when it closed on him late at night, when he went home, worn-out and tired, he worked for *The Day*. He was bought as surely as any slave was bought in the days of bondage. And his price was a magnificent one of four figures.

He expected his men to do as he did, in the service of the paper. For his goodwill, nothing sufficed but the complete subservience of all other interests to the work of *The Day*. Not until you did that, were you worthy to be on the paper and serve him. . . . And many hearts were broken in that room, with its hopeless gospel of materialism, where ideals were withered and nothing spiritual could survive.

Rivers was one of the young men who had won himself to power by the brute force of his intellect. He knew his own business to the tips of his fingers, and, beyond that, nothing mattered. Art and literature and the finer qualities of life could not enter into the practical range of his vision. They were not news. The great halfpenny public cared for nothing but news —a murder mystery, for choice ; and the only chance art or literature had of awaking his interest was for the artist to commit suicide in extraordinary circumstances, or for the novelist to murder his publisher. ("By George!" I can hear Rivers saying, "here's a ripping story. . . . Here's an author murdered his publisher . . . 'm . . . 'm . . . I suppose it's justifiable homicide.")

But on news—red-hot news—he was splendid. He might be sitting in his chair, joking idly with anybody who happened to be in the room, and suddenly the boy would bring in a slip from the tape machine : a submarine

wreck! Immediately, the listless, joking man would become swiftly serious and grim. He would decide instantly on the choice of reporters—two should be sent to the scene. "Boy, bring the A.B.C. No train. Damn it, why didn't that kid bring the news in at once. He dawdled five minutes. We could have caught the 3.42. Well, look up the trains to Southampton. Four o'clock. O'Brien, telephone up Southampton and tell them to have a car to take *The Day* reporters on. Boy, ask Mr Wratten and Mr Pride to come up. O'Brien, send a wire to the local chaps—tell 'em to weigh in all they can. Notify the post-office five thousand words from Portsmouth. Too late for photographs to-night — ring through to the artists, we'll have a diagram and a map. Off Southsea, eh? Shove in a picture of Southsea. . . ." And in an hour it would all be over, and Rivers, a new man with news stirring in the world, would playfully punch O'Brien in the chest, and gather about him a reporter or two for company, and bestow wonderful largesse in the shape of steaks and champagne. That was the human thing about Rivers. He was master absolute, and yet there was no sharp dividing line between him and the men under him. The discipline was there, but it was never obtruded. They drank, and joked, and scored off each other, and Rivers, when things were slack, would tell them some of his early adventures, but whenever it came to the test, his authority in his sphere was supreme. He knew how to get the best work out of his men; and, I think, sometimes, he was sorry for the men who had not, and never would get, a salary of four figures.

Humphrey could not understand him. At times he would be brutally cruel, and morose, scarcely speaking a word to anybody except Wratten, who was generally in his good books; at other times he would come to the office as light-hearted as a child, and urge them all into

good-humour, and make them feel that there was no life in the world equal to theirs. Since that day when Humphrey had first met him in Ferrol's room, and he had laughed and said, "You're not a genius, are you?" Rivers had not taken any particular notice of him. When he came into Rivers' room, halting and nervous, he envied the easy freedom of the other reporters who chanced to be there. Wratten sitting on a table, dangling his legs, and Tommy Pride, with his hat on the back of his head, and a pipe in his mouth, while a third man might be looking over the diary of the day's events.

"Hullo, Quain . . ."

"Good-morning, Mr Rivers."

"O'Brien, what have you got for Quain. Eh? Nothing yet. Go downstairs and wait."

Or else: "Nothing doing this morning. You'd better do this lecture at seven o'clock. Give him the ticket, O'Brien."

And, as Humphrey left the room, he heard Wratten say casually, "I'll do that Guildhall luncheon to-day, Rivers, eh?" And Rivers replied, "Right-O. We shall want a column."

Splendid Wratten, he thought! How long would it be before he acquired such ease, such sure familiarity—how long before he should prove himself worthy to dangle his legs freely in the presence of Rivers.

Within a few days something happened that made Humphrey the celebrity of a day in the reporters' room. It was a fluke, a happy chance, as most of the good things in life are. A man had killed himself in a London street under most peculiar circumstances. He had dressed himself in woman's clothes, and only, after death, when they took him to the hospital, did they find that the dead body was that of a man. He was employed in a solicitor's office near Charing Cross Road. His name was Bellowes, and he was married, and

lived at Surbiton. These facts were published briefly in the afternoon papers. Rivers, scenting a mystery, threw his interest into the story. There is nothing like a mystery for selling the paper. He sent for Willoughby.

Humphrey had found Willoughby one of the most astonishing individuals of the reporters' room. He was a tall, slim man, with a hollow-cheeked face and a forehead that was always frowning. His hair fell in disorder almost over his eyebrows, and whenever he wrote he pulled his hair about with his left hand, and mumbled the sentences as he wrote them. His speciality was crime: he knew more of the dark underside of human nature than any one Humphrey had met. He knew the intimate byways of crime, and its motives; every detective in the Criminal Investigation Department was his friend, and though by the rigid law of Scotland Yard they were forbidden to give information, he could chat with them, make his own deductions as well as any detective, and sometimes accompany them when an arrest was expected. He drew his information from unknown sources, and he was always bringing the exclusive news of some crime or other to *The Day*.

He was a bundle of nerves, for he lived always in a world of expectancy. At any moment, any hour, day and night, something would be brought to light. Murder and sudden death and mystery formed the horizon of his thoughts.

Humphrey had found a friend in Willoughby. In very contrast to the work in which he was engaged, he kept the room alive with merriment. He could relate stories as well as he could write them, and he spoke always with the set phrases of old-time journalism that had a ludicrous effect on his listeners. His character was a strange mixture of shrewdness, worldly-wisdom, and ingenuousness, and this was reflected in the books he carried always with him. In one pocket there would

be an untranslatable French novel, and, in the other, by way of counterblast, a Meredith or a Stevenson. He and Humphrey had often talked about books, and Willoughby showed the temperament of a cultured scholar and a philosopher when he discussed literature.

Willoughby went up to Rivers' room.

"Here you are, my son," said Rivers, tossing him over the cuttings on the affair of the strange suicide. "Get down to Surbiton and see if you can nose out anything. I'll get some one else to look after the London end."

The some one else chanced to be Humphrey, for there was nobody but him left in the reporters' room. Thus it came about that, a few minutes after Willoughby had set out for Surbiton, Humphrey came out on Fleet Street with instructions to look after the "London end" of the tragedy.

Rivers' parting words were ringing in his ears. They had a sinister meaning in them. ". . . And don't you fall down, young man," he had said, using the vivid journalistic metaphor for failure.

The busy people of the street surged about him, as he stood still for a moment trying to think where he should begin on the London end. He felt extraordinarily inexperienced and helpless. . . . He thought how Wratten would have known at once where to go, or how easily Tommy Pride, with his years of training, could do the job. He did not dare ask Rivers to teach him his business—he had enough common sense to know that, at any cost, his ignorance must be hidden under a mask of wisdom.

The reporter thrust suddenly face to face with a mystery that must be unravelled in a few hours is a fit subject for tragedy. He is a social outlaw. He has not the authority of the detective, and none of the secret information of a department at his hand. He is a tres-

passer in private places, a Peeping Tom, with his eye to a chink in the shuttered lives of others. His inner self wrenches both ways; he loathes and loves his duty. The human man in him says, "This is a shocking tragedy!" The journalist subconsciously murmurs, "This will be a column at least." Tears, and broken hearts, and the dismal tragedy of it all pass like a picture before him, and leave him unmoved.

The public stones him for obeying their desires. He would gladly give up all this sorry business . . . and perhaps his salvation lies in his own hand if he becomes sufficiently strong and bold to cry "Enough!"

And this is the tragedy of it—he is neither strong nor bold; and so we may appreciate the picture of Humphrey Quain faced for the first time with the crisis that comes into every journalist's life, when his work revolts his finer senses.

He went blindly up the street, and newsboys ran towards him with raucous shouts, offering the latest news of the suicide. He bought a copy, and read through the story. It occurred to him that the best thing he could do was to go to the offices near Charing Cross Road, where the dead man had worked.

He took an omnibus. It was five o'clock in the evening, and most of the passengers were City men going home. Lucky people—their work was finished, and his was not yet begun.

When he came to the building he wanted, he paused outside. It was a ghastly business. What on earth should he say? What right had he to go and ask questions—there would be an inquest. Surely the public could wait till then for the sordid story. It was ghoulish.

He went into the office and asked the young man at the counter whether Mr Parfitt (the name of the partner) was in. The young man must have guessed his business

in a moment. Humphrey felt as if he had a placard hanging round his neck, "I am a newspaper man." "No," snapped the young man, curtly, "he's out."

"When will he be back?" asked Humphrey.

"I don't know," the young man answered, obstinately. "Who are you from?" That was a form of insult reserved for special occasions: it implied, you see, that the caller was obviously not of such appearance as to suggest that he was anything but a paid servant.

Humphrey said: "I wanted to talk about this sad tragedy of—"

The young man looked him up and down, and said, "We've nothing to say."

"But—" began Humphrey.

"We've nothing to say." The young man's lips closed tightly together with a grimace of absolute finality. Humphrey hesitated: he knew that the whole mystery lay within the knowledge of this spiteful person, if only he could be overcome.

"Look here," said the young man, threateningly. "Why don't you damn reporters mind your own business. You're the seventh we've 'ad up 'ere. We've nothing to say. See?" His voice rose to a shriller key. He was a very unpleasant young man, but fortunately he dropped his "h's," which modified, in some strange way, in Humphrey's mind the effect of his onslaught. The young man who had at first seemed somebody of importance, faded away now merely to an underbred nonentity. Humphrey laughed at him.

"You might keep your h's if you can't keep your temper," he said.

Then he left the office, feeling sorry for himself. It was nearly six o'clock, and he was no further. A hall-porter sat reading a paper in front of the fireplace. Humphrey tried diplomacy. He remarked on the tragedy: the hall-porter agreed it was very tragic.

There had been seven other reporters before him (marvellous how policemen and hall-porters seemed to know him at once). Humphrey felt in his pocket for half-a-crown and slipped it into the porter's hand. The porter thanked him with genuine gratitude.

"Well," said Humphrey, "what sort of a chap was this Mr Bellowes."

"Can't say as how I ever saw him," said the porter; "this is my first day here."

"O lord!" groaned Humphrey.

He was in the street again, pondering what he should do. And suddenly that intuitive reasoning power of his began to work. A man who worked in the neighbourhood would conceivably be known to the shopkeepers round about. He visited the shops adjoining the building where the dead man worked, but none of them yielded any information, not even the pawnbrokers. The men whom he asked seemed quite willing to help, but they knew nothing. Finally, he went into the Green Lion public-house which stands at the corner by a court.

Hitherto public-houses had not interested him very much: he went into them rarely, because in Easterham, where every one's doings were noted, it was considered the first step downwards to be seen going into a public-house. Thus, he had grown up without acquiring the habit of promiscuous drinking.

There were a good many people in the bar, and the briskness of business was marked by the frequent pinging noise of the bell in the patent cash till, as a particularly plain-looking young woman pulled the drawer open to drop money in. Humphrey asked for bottled beer. "Cannock's?" the barmaid asked. "Please." She gave him the drink. He said "Thank you." She said "Thank you." She gave him the change, and said "Thank you" again. Whereupon, in accordance with our polite

custom, he murmured a final "'Kyou." Then she went away with an airy greeting to some fresh customer.

Presently she came back to where Humphrey was standing. He plunged boldly.

"Sad business this of Mr Bellowes?" he ventured, taking a gulp at his beer. She raised her eyebrows in inquiry.

"Haven't you read about—" he held a crumpled evening paper in his hand. "The tragedy, I mean."

"Oh yes," she said. "Very sad, isn't it?"

A man came between them. "'Ullo, Polly, lovely weather, don't it?" he said, cheerfully, counting out six coppers, and making them into a neat pile on the table. "Same as usual."

"Now then, Mister Smart!" said Polly, facetiously, bringing him a glass of whisky. "All the soda."

"Up to the pretty, please," he said, adding "Whoa-er" as the soda-water bubbled to the level of the fluted decorations round the glass. Small talk followed, frequently interrupted by fresh arrivals. A quarter of an hour passed. The cheerful man had one more drink, and finally departed, with Polly admonishing him to "Be good," to which he replied, "I always am." Humphrey ordered another Cannock.

"Did he often come here?"

"Who?" asked Polly. "Mr Jobling—the man who's gone out?"

"No. I mean Mr Bellowes."

"I'm sure I don't know," she said a little distantly. "Those gentlemen over there"—nodding to a corner of the bar where two men stood in the shadows—"can tell you all about him. They were telling me something about him just before you came in. Fourpence, please."

Humphrey took with him his glass of beer, and went to the two men. They were both drinking whisky, and

they seemed to be in a good humour. They turned at Humphrey's wavering "Excuse me . . ."

"Eh?" said one of the men.

"Excuse me . . ." Humphrey repeated. "I'm told you knew Mr Bellowes."

"Well," said the other man, a little truculently. "What if we did?"

It seemed to Humphrey that the most absolute frankness was desirable here.

"Look here," he said, "I wish you'd help me by telling me something about him. Here's my card. . . . I'm on *The Day*."

The younger of the two men smiled, and winked. "You've got a nerve," he said. "Why you couldn't print it if we told you."

"Couldn't I? Well, never mind. Let's have a drink on it anyway."

Humphrey began his third Cannock, and the others drank whisky. One of them, in drinking, spilt a good deal of the liquor over his coat lapel, and did not bother to wipe it off: he was slightly drunk.

"It's bringing a bad reputation on the firm," said the elder man. "Name in all the papers."

Humphrey was seized with an idea. He knew now that the whole secret of the mystery was within his grasp. One of the men, at least, was from the solicitor's office. The instinct of the journalist made him courageous: he would never leave the bar until he got the story.

"I'll tell you what," he said, "I'll promise to keep the name of the firm out of *The Day*"; I'll just refer to it as a firm of solicitors!"

"That's not a bad notion," said the younger man. He drew the elder man aside and they talked quietly for a few minutes. Then more drinks were ordered. Humphrey tackled his fourth Cannock. His head was just beginning to ache.

A tantalizing half-hour passed. The younger man seemed more friendly to Humphrey—he had some friends in Fleet Street; did Humphrey know them, and so on. The elder man was growing more drunk. He swayed a little now. Humphrey's ears buzzed, and his vision was not so acute. The outlines of people were blurred and indistinct. "Good lord," he murmured to himself, "I'm getting drunk too." He was pleasantly happy, and smiled into his sixth glass of beer. He confided to the elder man that he admired him for his constancy to the dead man, and they began to talk over the bad business as friends. The elder man even called him "Ol' chap." They really were very affectionate.

"But WHY did he do it?" said Humphrey; "that's what beats me."

"Oh, well, you see he was in love with this girl . . ."

"Which girl?"

"Why, Miss Sycamore . . . you know the little girl that sings, 'Come Round and See Me in the Evening,' in the *Pompadour Girl*."

"No. Was he?"

"Was he not," said the elder man, with a hiccough. "Why, he used to be talking to me all day about her. . . . And the letters. My word, you should see the letters . . . he used to show them to me before he sent them off. Full of high thinking and all that."

And gradually the whole story came out, in scattered pieces, that Humphrey saw he could put together into a real-life drama. Never once did he think of the dead man, or the dead man's wife in Surbiton (Willoughby was probably doing his best there). He only saw the secret drama unfolding itself like a novelist's plot. The meetings, the letters, the double life of Bellowes, a respectable churchwarden in Surbiton; a libertine in London—and then she threw him over; declined to see him when he called at the stage door; he had

dressed himself as a woman, hoping to pass the stage-door keeper. Perhaps if he had got as far as the dressing-room, maddened by the breakage of his love, and the waste of his intrigue, there might have been a double tragedy. And so to the final grotesque death in the street.

It was eight o'clock when Humphrey had the whole story in his mind, and by that time, though he knew he had drunk far too much, he was not so drunk as the other two men.

"There you are, old boy," said the elder man, affectionately. "You can print it all, and keep my name and the name of the firm out of the papers."

"So long," said the younger man, as they parted at the door of the bar. "You won't have another."

"I'd better get back now," Humphrey replied. "Thanks awfully. You've done me a good turn."

He walked back to the office; the late evening papers still bore on their posters the word "Mystery" —but he alone of all the people hurrying to and fro knew the key of the mystery. He had set forth a few hours ago—it seemed years—ignorant of everything, and, behold, he had put a finger into the tragedy of three lives. All that feeling of revolt and hatred of his business passed away from him, and left in its place nothing but a great joy that he had succeeded, where he never dreamt success was possible. After this he knew he must be a journalist for ever, a licensed meddler in the affairs of other people.

And so, with his head throbbing, and his legs a little unsteady, he came back to the office of *The Day*. It was nine o'clock; Rivers had left the office for the night, and O'Brien was out at dinner. He went to Mr Selsey, and told him briefly all he knew.

"Where did you get it from?" Selsey asked.

"From some friends of his; I promised I wouldn't

mention the name of the firm of solicitors he worked in."

"What about Miss Sycamore?"

"Miss Sycamore?" echoed Humphrey, blankly.

"Yes. Haven't you got her? We must know what she says. It mayn't be true."

Humphrey's head swam. He was appalled at the idea of having to go out again, and face the woman in the sordid case. Selsey looked at the clock. "I'll send somebody else up to see her—she's at the Hilarity Theatre, isn't she? You'd better get on with the main story. Write all you can."

He went to the reporters' room; nobody was there except Wratten, just finishing his work. Humphrey sat down at a desk, and began to write. His brain was whirling with the facts he had learnt; they tumbled over one another, until he did not know how to tell them all. He started to write, and he found that he could not even begin the story. He tore up sheet after sheet in despair. The clock went past the quarter and Humphrey was still staring helplessly at the blank paper. Wratten finished his work and dashed out with his copy to the sub-editor's room.

"I'm drunk," he said to himself. "That's what's the matter."

And later: "What a fool I was to drink so much."

And then, as if in excuse: "But I shouldn't have got the story if I hadn't drunk with them."

A boy came to him. "Mr Selsey says have you got the first sheets of your story."

"Tell him he'll have them in a few minutes," Humphrey said.

And when Wratten came into the room he found Humphrey with his head on his outstretched arms, and his shoulders shaken with his sobbing.

"Hullo! What's up, old man?" asked Wratten, bending over him. "Not well?"

Humphrey lifted a red-eyed face to Wratten. "I'm drunk," he said. "My head's awful."

"Bosh!" Wratten said cheerfully, "you're sober enough. Selsey's delighted you've got your story. I suppose it was a hard story to get."

Humphrey groaned. "I can't write it. . . . I can't get even the beginning of it."

"That happens to all of us. I have to begin my story half a dozen times before I get the right one. Look here, let me help you. Tell me as much as you can." He touched the bell, and a boy appeared. "Go and get a cup of black coffee—a large cup, Napoleon," he said jovially to the boy, giving him a sixpenny piece.

By the time the coffee had arrived, Humphrey had told Wratten the story. "By George!" said Wratten, "that's fine! Now, let's do it between ourselves. Don't bother about plans. Start right in with the main facts and put them at the top. Always begin with the fact, and tell the story in the first two paragraphs—then you've got the rest of the column to play about in."

The coffee woke Humphrey up. In a quarter of an hour, with Wratten's help, the story was well advanced, and Selsey's boy had gone away with the first slips. Whenever he came to a dead stop, Wratten told him how to continue. "Wrap it up carefully," Wratten said. "Talk about the dead man's pure love for anything that was artistic: say that he was a slave to art, and that Miss Sycamore typified art for him. That'll please her. Say that she never encouraged his attentions, and that realizing life was empty without her, he killed himself. Make it the psychological tragedy of a man in love with an Ideal that he could never attain. And don't gloat."

The story was finished. "That's all right," Wratten said.

"Look here—" Humphrey began, but something choked his throat. He felt as if Wratten had rescued him from the terror of failure: his glimpse of brotherhood overwhelmed him.

"Stow it!" said Wratten, unconcernedly. "It's the paper I was thinking of. Well, I'm off. Don't say a word about it in the morning."

. . . . . .

And there it was, in the morning, the whole story with glaring headlines, an exclusive story for *The Day*. Humphrey, riding down Gray's Inn Road, saw the bills in the shop-windows, and two men in the omnibus were discussing it: his head was dull with the drink of last night, but he felt exhilarated when he thought of it all. He wanted to tell the two men in the omnibus that he had written the story in *The Day*. He came to the office and the fellows in the reporters' room seemed as glad as he was. Willoughby told him of his Surbiton adventure, and how Mrs Bellowes declined to see anybody. And when he went into Rivers' room, the great man smiled and said facetiously, "Well, young man, I suppose you're pleased with yourself." He winked at Wratten. "You'll be editor one day, eh?"

"It's a jolly good story," said Wratten, "the best *The Day's* had for a long time."

Humphrey smiled weakly. He would have told Rivers just how it came to be such a jolly good story, if Wratten had not frowned meaningly at him. And not until Rivers said: "Come off that desk, young man, and see what you can do with this—" handing him a job, did Humphrey realize that he was at ease, dangling his legs with the great ones.

III

NOT everything that Humphrey did was difficult, nor undesirable. There were times when his card with *The Day* on it opened the doors of high places, magically: there were many people who welcomed him, actors and playwrights and people to whom publicity such as the reporter can give is necessary. He was received by countesses who were engaged in propaganda work, and by lordlings who were interested in schemes for the alleged welfare of the people: these people wanted to be interviewed, many of them even prepared their statements beforehand. But, in spite of the advantage they gained, they always treated him with that polite restraint which the English aristocracy adopt towards the inferior classes. He obtained wonderful peeps into grand houses, with huge staircases, and enormous rooms with panelled walls and candelabra and rare pictures; into Government offices, too, when an inquiry was necessary, where permanent officials worked, heedless of the change of Ministers that went on with each new Government; and once he went into the dressing-room of Sir Wimborne Johns, that very famous actor, who shook him by the hand, and treated Humphrey as one of his best friends, and told him two funny stories while the dresser was adjusting his make-up for Act II.

Then there were the meetings—amazingly futile gatherings of people who met in the rooms of hotels, the Caxton Hall at Westminster or the Memorial Hall in Farringdon Street. These meetings gave young Humphrey an insight into the petty little vanities of life. They were hot-beds of mutual admiration. What

was their business and what did they achieve? Heaven only knows! They had been in existence for years; this was perhaps the seventh or eighth or twenty-sixth annual meeting of the Anti-Noise Society, and the world was not yet silent. Yet here were the old ladies and the old gentlemen and the secretary (in a frock coat) congratulating themselves on an excellent year's work, and passing votes of thanks to each other, as though they were giving lollipops to children. These meetings were all built on one scheme. They always began half an hour late, because there were so few people in the room. The reporters (and here Humphrey sometimes met Beaver) sat at a green baize-covered table near the speakers, and were given all sorts of printed matter—enough to fill the papers they represented, and, occasionally, men and women would sidle up to them, and give their visiting-cards, and say, "Be sure and get the initials right," or, "Would you like to interview me on Slavery in Cochin-China?" Then the chairman (Sir Simon Sloper) arrived, whiskered and florid-faced, and every one clapped their hands; and the secretary read letters and telegrams of regret which he passed to the reporters' table; and then they read the balance-sheet and the annual report, and Miss Heggie Petty, with the clipped accent of Forfarshire, gave her district report, and W. Black-Smith, Esq. ("Please don't forget the hyphen in *The Day*"), delivered *his* district report, and then the secretary spoke again, and the treasurer reminded them, with a sternly humorous manner, that the annual subscriptions were overdue, and, finally, came the great event of the afternoon: Sir Simon Sloper rose to address the meeting. Everybody was hugely interested, except the reporters, to whom it was platitudinous and tediously stale: they had heard it all before, times without number, at all the silly little meetings of foolish people the Sir Simon Slopers had their moments of adulation and

their reward of a paragraph in the papers. Nothing vital, nothing of great and lasting importance, was ever done at these meetings, yet every day six or seven of them were held.

There were societies and counter societies: there was a society for the suppression of this, and a society for the encouragement of that; there was the Society for Sunday Entertainment, and the Society for Sunday Rest; every one seemed to be pulling in opposite directions, and every one imagined that his or her views were best for the people. Humphrey found the reflection of all this in the advertisement columns of *The Day*, where there were advertisements of lotions that grew hair on bald heads, or ointment that took away superfluous hair; medicines that made fat people thin, or pills that made thin people fat; tonics that toned down nervous, high-strung people, and phosphates that exhilarated those who were depressed. Life was a terribly ailing thing viewed through the advertisement columns; one seemed to be living in an invalid world, suffering from lumbago and nervous debility. It was a nightmare of a world, where people were either too florid or too pale, too fat or too thin, too bald or too hairy, too tall or too short . . . and yet the world went on unchangingly, just as it did after the meetings of all the little societies of men or women who met together to give moral medicine to the world.

It is necessary that you should see these things from the same point of view as Humphrey, to realize the effect of it all on the development of his character. For after a dose of such meetings, when the careful reports of speeches that seemed important enough at the time, were either cut down by the sub-editors to three lines, or left out of the paper altogether, he asked himself the question: Why?

Why do all these people hold meetings?

And the answer came to him with a shock: "They are doing it all for *me*. Everything that is going on is being done for *me*."

And as he realized that he was only an onlooker, a creature apart, something almost inhuman without a soul for pity or gladness, a dweller on the outskirts of life, a great longing came over him to join in it all himself. It seemed that this gigantic game of love and passion and sudden death and great achievement, was worth learning, and those who did not learn it, and only looked on while the tumult was whirling about them, were but shadows that faded away with the sunset of years.

He wanted to join in. He saw, now, that he was drifting nowhere. He, too, wanted to share in the great game, playing a part that was not to be ignored, that was needful to the success of the game. Alone he brooded on it. Beaver chaffed him and asked him what was up. Impossible to explain the perplexities of his inmost mind to Beaver.

"I don't know," he said, "I've got the hump."

They were having breakfast in the common sitting-room.

"Haven't they printed your stuff?"

"It isn't that," Humphrey said.

"Well, what's up?" demanded the insistent Beaver.

"Everything!" said Humphrey, gloomily, looking round the room. The bulrushes were still there. "Everything. This . . . I feel as we used to feel at Easterham!"

"I know what's the matter with you," said Beaver, folding his napkin, and pushing back his chair from the table. He regarded Humphrey with tremendous wisdom, and bit his nails. "You've got the hump," he said, smiling at his inspiration. "Too many late hours."

"I suppose so."

"Well, look here, don't you get brooding. You want

company. I vote we have lunch together to-day. You come and call for me at the office, at one."

"Right you are, I will if I can," Humphrey replied.

All the morning he remained in the same mood, grappling with the new aspect of things that had come to him. Alone he brooded on it: he heard Rivers running through the programme of the day's events—the King going to Windsor, a new battleship being launched, a murderer to be tried at the Old Bailey, a society scandal in the Law Courts—the usual panorama of every day, at which Rivers told his men to look. And it was a great thing for the people of Windsor that the King was coming; there would be flags and guards of honour, and the National Anthem; and the reputation of a ship-building firm, and the anxiety of thousands rested on the successful launch of the battleship, and a weary woman in a squalid slum was waiting tremblingly for the issue of the murder trial; but all these things, of such great import to those who played in the game, were not shared by those who looked on. And as Humphrey listened to Rivers, he realized that though they all moved with life, they were not of it.

He remembered a story that Willoughby told of a Salvation Army meeting in the Albert Hall, when General Booth had walked up and down the platform speaking of the glories of salvation, and, suddenly, he pointed a finger at the table below. "Are you saved?" he asked, with his finger shaking at a man who was looking up at him. "Me?" said the man, looking about him confusedly, and then, with a touch of indignation at being suddenly dragged into the game, "Me? I'm a reporter!"

He remembered that story now, and all that it expressed. At the time Willoughby told it, he thought it was a good joke, but now he saw the cruel irony of it.

And, in this frame of mind, as he was at grips with

himself, he went to call for Beaver. A light glimmered in the darkness of his mind, and the Joy and Spirit of Life itself, playing, instead of the Pipes of Pan, the keys of a typewriter, smiled upon him, and gave him the vision of a girlish face in a halo of fair hair that seemed threaded with gold as the sunlight touched it.

IV

He went into the office of the Special News Agency and found himself in a room where half-a-dozen girls were typewriting. They were making manifold copies of the hundred and one events that the Special News Agency "covered" with its Beavers, and supplied at a fixed annual rate to the newspapers. The Special News Agency were, so to speak, wholesale dealers in news. You bought the reports of Ministers' speeches or out-of-the-way lawsuits by the column. It was the same principle that governed the *Easterham Gazette* and its columns of stereo. No newspaper could afford a sufficiently large staff of reporters to cover everything. So the Special News Agency had its corps of verbatim shorthand writers, its representatives in every small village, and in every police-court. There was, of course, no room for the play of imagination or fantasy or style in these Special News Agency reports, and it was because of their rather stilted writing that the reporters on papers like *The Day* and *The Sentinel* and *The Herald* were sent sometimes over the same ground that the News Agency men had covered, to see if they could infuse some fresh interest into the story, or at all events to rewrite it, so that instead of each paper being uniform, it would strike its individual note in the presentation of news. The Special News Agency did for London and England what Reuter does for the world.

There was among the cluster of girls working at their typewriters one who looked up at Humphrey and smiled, as he waited for Beaver. She was not a particularly pretty girl, but there was a quality in her hair and eyes

and in the expression of her face that lifted it out of the commonplace. The mere fact that out of all the girls who were at work in the office, she alone left the memory of her face to Humphrey, is sufficient tribute to her personality.

She smiled—and Humphrey remembered that smile, and the hair, that was dull brown in shadow and gleaming with golden threads in the sunlight, and the eyes, that were either grey or blue, and very large. And then, Beaver came and took him to lunch.

They went to a Fleet Street public-house, and lunched off steak and bubble-and-squeak for a shilling, and all through the lunch Humphrey was thinking of other things—especially a smile.

"Well," said Beaver, "got over your hump?"

"I suppose so," Humphrey answered. ("I wonder what her name is?")

"Life's not so bad when you get used to it?" Beaver remarked, contemplating his inky thumbs. "The trouble is that just as you're getting used to it, it's time to die. Eh?"

Humphrey's thoughts were wandering again. ("I believe those eyes were saying something to me?") Beaver continued in his chatter, and occasionally Humphrey, catching the sense of his last few words, agreed with a mechanical "Yes," or a nod ("Why did she smile at me?"), and at last he blurted out, "I say, Beaver, what's the name of the girl that sits nearest the door in your office?"

"O lord! I don't know their names," said Beaver; "I've got other things to think about. What d'you want to know for?"

"She's like some one I knew in Easterham," Humphrey replied, glibly.

"I'll find out for you, if you like."

"No—don't bother. It doesn't matter at all."

The next day he was walking down Fleet Street when he perceived her looming through the crowd. He was conscious of a queer emotion that attacked him, a sudden dryness of the throat, and a quickening of all the pulses of his body. His whole being became swiftly taut: he almost stood still. And, as she bore down upon him, he saw that she was not so tall as he had imagined, but her face looked divinely attractive under the shadow of the spreading hat, and because the sun was shining her hair glittered like a halo. Now, she was close to him, and he found himself praying to God that she would look at him, and smile again; and the next moment he felt that the ground would sink beneath him if she did so, and he longed to look the other way, but could not. The people passing to and fro knew nothing of the terrific disturbance that was going on in the mind of the young man walking down Fleet Street. Now they were level—he raised his hat—it was over, and the memory of her smile had sunk yet deeper within him. Yes, She had remembered him, and nodded to him, and that smile—what did it mean? It was not an enticing smile, it was an almost imperceptible movement of the closed lips, yet it held some magic in it. It seemed to him that though they had never spoken, she knew all about him; she came across his life, smiling in silence, and he was aware that something triumphant and fresh had come into his life, with her passing, just as he knew for a certainty that, before long, he would learn the secret of her smile, when he spoke to her.

He went back to work, curiously elated and happy for no reason at all that he could understand. Things were unaltered, and yet, somehow or other, they were different. He felt, suddenly, as if years had been added to his age; he felt that he had met something real in life at last, and, when he came to analyse it, it was

nothing but an intangible smile, and the glance of two grey eyes.

That night, as he was on his way home, he chanced to meet Wratten. This tall man with the high forehead and curly hair was one of the puzzles of the office. He was a man who held aloof from his fellows, and because of that, they thought he was morose. Humphrey had a tremendous admiration for him, since the night when Wratten had helped him. He seemed so very splendid: he did daring things, and he never failed. The secret of his success was a brutality that stultified all his better feelings when he was on business. And he was a man who never left his quarry, though it meant waiting hours and hours for him.

"Hullo," said Wratten, "where are you off to?"

"Home," said Humphrey; "where are you?"

"I'm going home too. I live at the Hampden Club at King's Cross."

They were near Guilford Street. "Won't you come up, Wratten, and have a drink in my rooms—I live here, you know."

"I don't take anything stronger than lemonade," said Wratten.

Humphrey laughed, and unlocked the door. He felt it an honour to have Wratten as a guest, if only for a few minutes. They went upstairs, and Humphrey apologized for the bulrushes. Wratten laughed: "Why don't you suggest to Rivers that you should write a story about the dangers of bulrushes in sitting-rooms: interview a doctor or two, and make 'em say that bulrushes accumulate dust. Invent a new disease, 'Bulrush Throat.' That'll make your landlady nervous."

"By George," Humphrey said, "I will; that's a fine idea." Doubtless, you remember the scare that was raised a few years ago when *The Day* discovered

the terror that lurked in the sitting-room bulrush; you remember, perhaps, the correspondence, and the symposium of doctors' views that followed, and *The Day's* leading article on the mighty matter. Humphrey Quain set the ball rolling, and was careful to leave marked copies of *The Day* in places where Mrs Wayzgoose was certain to see them, and the bulrushes disappeared very soon afterwards. Thus is history made.

"I owe you a lot of thanks," Humphrey said, "for the way you helped me the other night."

It was the first time they had referred to the matter of the street suicide.

"I didn't want you to be let down," said Wratten. "The life's rough enough as it is, a little help goes a long way. But you steer clear of too much drink, Quain. That's the ruin of so many good men. . . ."

"I couldn't help it."

"Of course you couldn't—most men are drunkards from habit and not from choice. But you can take it from me, there's no room in Fleet Street for a man who drinks too much. They used to think it was fine Bohemianism in the old days, when a man wasn't a genius unless he was drunk half the time. Don't you believe it. It's the sober men who do the work and win through."

"It depends on what you mean by winning through."

"Well, there are many ways. . . . I suppose we've all got different ideas and ideals. I want to rear a family and keep a wife."

"You aren't married then?"

"Not yet. I'm going to be married . . . soon," said Wratten, simply. "I think marriage is the best thing for us. We want something to humanize our lives. It is the only chance of happiness for most of us . . . the knowledge that whatever happens, however hard the

work may be, we come home . . . and there's a wife waiting. I know plenty of journalists who would have gone under if it were not for the wives. Splendid wives! They sit at home patiently, knowing all our troubles, comforting us, and keeping us cheerful. By God! Quain, the journalists' wives are the most beautiful and loyal women in the world. . . ."

Humphrey smiled—and this was the man they thought was morose!

"I get maudlin and sentimental when I think of 'em. They know our weaknesses, and our mistakes, and they bear with us. They smooth our hair and touch our faces, and all the misery of the day goes away with the magic of their fingers. They make little dinners for us, that we never eat, and they never let us see how unhappy they are, too . . . I know, I know . . . I've seen so many journalists' homes, and they're all the same . . . they're simply overgrown children who let themselves be mothered by their wives."

Humphrey thought of the girl he had passed that day in the street. . . . "I wish I were you," he said. "It must be rather fine to have some one pegging away at you always to do your best: it must be rather fine to have a smile waiting for you at the end of the long day's work."

"Fine!" said Wratten, "it's the only thing that's left to us. We're robbed of everything else that matters. We haven't a soul to call our own, and we can't even rule our lives. Time, that precious heritage of every one else, doesn't belong to us. We're supposed to have no hearts, we're just machines that have always to be working at top speed . . . but, thank God, there's one woman who believes in us, and who is waiting for us always."

"It's funny you should talk like this," Humphrey said, "to-night, of all nights. . . ." He was thinking again

of himself and the girl who had crossed the path of his life.

Wratten knocked out the ashes of his pipe, and coughed with that little dry cough that was characteristic of him. "Oh! I don't know," he said. "Nothing funny when you come to think about it. I thought you might have heard it in the office. I'm being married to-morrow. By the way, I wish you'd come along and be best man: I haven't had time to fix up for one."

V

It was just an incident of almost less importance than the daily work, this business of getting married. But it was an incident that left a singular impression on Humphrey. Wratten's marriage was a prosaic affair, in a registry office, horribly formal, without the idealizing surroundings of a church and the grand solemnity of the marriage service. It took place at ten o'clock on a rather cold morning in June. Wratten himself was extremely nervous, and it was his nervousness that made his manner almost brusque; he must have been a gloomy lover, and yet, as Humphrey saw the dark-eyed bride he was wedding, and marked the pride in her eyes as she looked up to him, and the fluttering of her lips as she whispered things to him, he knew that somewhere in this rugged blunt nature of Wratten there was a vein of golden tenderness and beauty,

The marriage was oddly depressing: perhaps it was that the shadow of coming disaster hovered over them; perhaps Humphrey heard Wratten's words echoing in his ears, "They sit at home patiently . . . knowing all our troubles, and they never let us see that they, too, are unhappy."

Humphrey did his duty as best man: there was a girl friend of the bride there, and he looked after them all, and cracked jokes, and made them sign their names in the right places, and Wratten had half a dozen little commissions for him to carry out. He had been so busy yesterday, that there had not been time to clear up everything.

When it was all over, and Wratten stood on the

threshold of a new life, with his wife at his side, and a glad, proud smile on his handsome face, they came out of the registry office, and the girl friend emptied a bag of confetti over them, as they stepped into the cab that was to take them to Waterloo—they were going to Weymouth for a honeymoon. Some of the coloured pieces of paper fell on Humphrey's coat collar.

"Good-bye, good luck," Humphrey said.

Wratten clasped his hand very tightly. Once again he smiled, and gave his little dry, nervous cough. "Good-bye, old man," he said affectionately. "Thanks awfully for coming. I think I'm going to be happy at last," and the cab drove away.

Humphrey saw the girl friend into an omnibus. "Didn't Maisie look splendid." He noticed that the girl friend wore an engagement-ring on her finger, and thenceforth he lost all interest in her.

He went to the office as usual, but he did not tell any one that he had been to Wratten's wedding. Now, he could feel quite at home in the reporters' room, and he even had a desk which, by custom, had become his own. He was more sure of himself than he had been a few months ago, though, in his inmost heart, he was still a little afraid of Rivers.

It was Ferrol who gave Humphrey confidence in himself. He called him into his room, and asked him bluntly how he liked the work.

"Very much," Humphrey replied, his eyes glistening brightly, and again Ferrol was reminded of the long years that had passed, when romantic days were his. The boy was shaping well. That was fine, thought Ferrol. He meant Humphrey to have every chance; he wanted to see what stuff was in him.

"That's good," said Ferrol, stroking his moustache. "Mr Rivers gives a satisfactory account of you."

The passion that ruled him, the passion for making

men and reputations, was strong upon him just then. He saw Humphrey as raw material, and he meant to mould him into a finished article after his own heart. He would make no mistakes, it should be done slowly, step by step; he would leave Humphrey to fight his own battles, and only if he fell bloody and wounded, would he come forward and succour the boy.

"I hope you'll keep it up," he said. "Don't get into trouble, but come to me if you do." He smiled and still caressed that fierce moustache. "I suppose you've heard I'm an ogre—don't believe any tale you hear. Just come straight to me when you are in any difficulty."

Humphrey came out of the room, exhilarated, and almost drunk with pride and happiness. It was Ferrol's magic again: a few words from him were like drops of oil to creaking machinery—they instilled fresh energy and desire into men, and made their hearts ardent for conquest. It was worth working night and day to have smooth words of praise from Ferrol himself, to know that he was watching you, powerful in his invisibility.

That afternoon, as he was returning from some engagement, he saw the girl with the smile coming towards him again. Afar off, it seemed, he was aware of her coming. It was as if her presence sent silent messages to him, vibrating through the air. Long before she appeared he had looked expectantly before him, knowing that she would approach him. Something in his mind linked up this neat blue-clad figure with the episode of the morning, and the little registry office, and Wratten saying, with that radiant smile of his, "I think I am going to be happy at last."

And, quite on the impulse of the moment, he made up his mind. She passed him, and left him all a-quiver with excitement, and then he turned and overtook her. His heart was beating quickly in the rhapsody of it all.

She stopped, noticing him at her side, hesitating, nervous.

"I say . . ."

"Oh!" She smiled, and he saw her cheeks flush with colour, and at once he noted her wonderfully slender throat and the mysterious beauty of her breathing.

He was tongue-tied for a moment. She had stopped and he was speaking to her, and he was lost in the miracle of those few seconds, when he realized that in all the loneliness of this vast London, they had met and spoken at last. They stood in a little island of their own making, while people coming and going broke in a hurried surge all about them. The newsboys ran up Fleet Street calling the hour of the latest race, and, above all, came the noise and restlessness of the traffic beating up and down the street.

"I say . . ." Humphrey began, "it's awfully rude of me to stop you like this . . ."

She smiled again. "Not at all," she said, in a gentle voice.

"Could you tell me if Mr Beaver happens to be in the office now?" he asked.

"I don't think he is," she said. "Why not come up and see?"

"N—no—it doesn't really matter." Humphrey laughed nervously. "I shall see him this evening. We dig together, you know."

"Then it doesn't matter . . .?" she said.

"It doesn't matter," Humphrey agreed.

He waited forlornly: now she would pass away again, always elusive, just flitting in and out of his life like this, a disturbing factor.

But still she waited, and Humphrey was emboldened.

"I say . . ." he stammered. "Won't you come and have a cup of tea?"

She glanced upwards at the clock.

"Do come," he said, half turning to lead the way. "There's a Lyons just near here."

"Oh, well . . ." she laughed and followed him.

"My name's Quain," he said, as they were drinking their cups of tea. "Humphrey Quain." He waited longingly, hoping that she would understand why he had told her his name.

She drooped her eyes; everything she did was exaggerated in Humphrey's imagination. She gave him her name as if she were yielding up part of herself to him.

"Mine is Filmer."

It was terribly unsatisfactory just to know that.

"I suppose you'll think me rude . . ." he began.

"Oh! you must guess. . . ."

"I never could. I should guess wrong."

"Try," she coaxed. "It begins with L."

He guessed Lily the second time, and she corrected him. "You're nearly right," she said, "it's Lilian."

"Lilian," he echoed, admiringly.

"It's a hateful name," she pouted.

"It's a lovely name," he said.

"Do you really think so?"

"Rather!"

"Why?" she smiled again.

What an absurd question to ask. Why, because—but how could Humphrey tell her, when they had hardly known each other for a quarter of an hour.

"I hope you didn't think it rude of me stopping you like that," he ventured, after a pause.

"Oh no . . . though I suppose you think it's dreadful of me to be sitting with you like this."

To tell the truth, Humphrey considered the whole thing was extraordinarily dashing—that he should be sitting facing her over a cup of tea; to have learnt her

name—Lilian Filmer—Lilian, beautiful name!—and to be carrying it off so calmly.

"Not at all," he said.

Her next words fell like a shower of cold water over him.

"You're such a boy," she said, with her eyes smiling indulgently at him.

He resented that, of course. "I'm twenty-one," he said loudly. "You're not more than twenty-one, I'm sure."

"Perhaps I'm not," she answered, taking a tiny watch from her bosom. She sighed. "I must go."

"Look here," said Humphrey, "are we going to meet again?"

"What do you want to see me again for?"

"I just want to," Humphrey said. "I'm all alone."

"Alone in London," she laughed. "Tragic boy . . . oh, how miserable you look. Don't you like being called a boy?"

"I don't mind what you call me, so long as you'll let me see you again. To-morrow's Saturday. . . ."

"Oh! I can't manage to-morrow."

"Well, on Sunday, then."

"I never go out on Sundays."

"On Monday," said Humphrey, desperately.

She considered the matter. "I know I'm engaged on Monday evening."

"We'll have lunch together."

"Very well," she said.

And, after that, they shook hands quite formally, and parted in Fleet Street. He had been in heaven for twenty minutes.

There were three days to Monday.

Lilian!

VI

OUT of this period of his career, Humphrey rescued memories of moments of ineffable happiness. They came intermittently, between long blanks of doubt and painful uncertainty, when his mind was troubled with unsatisfied yearnings and half-understood desires. He was able one day to look back upon it all, with an air of detached interest, like a man looking at a cinematograph picture, and he saw meetings, and partings, and all the ferment of his wooing of Lilian.

There was something intimate and secret about their meetings that pleased his palate, hungry for adventure, and this was a part of life that belonged wholly to them; he was indeed taking a part in the great game.

They met on the Monday at the hour appointed, and it seemed extraordinarily unreal, like a dream within a dream, that she should be wonderfully alive and smiling by his side. Fleet Street, the office, Rivers, and the long toil of the day were forgotten in a moment, such was the miracle of her being. It seemed impossible to him, on that day, that unhappiness and failure could darken his world. There was something eternal about her that moved him with strong, unquenchable desires for triumph and conquest. Her voice vibrated through him like the throb of a war-march, urging him to great endeavour.

So commonplace their greeting; so utterly inadequate to express the prodigious flutterings of his heart! They should have met alone in some solitary forest, when all the colours of the world were rushing to the clouds, in the hours of the sunset. He could have led her to a resting-place of moss and fern,

and whispered to her all the thoughts that were in his mind. . . .

But here in the world of everyday, what romance could survive the prosy clamour of it all. There was nothing to say but "Good-morning," and halting, nervous things about the weather, and the theatre, and each other's work. Anything of deeper import must be told by sighs and silences.

And thus, they parted again, after their lunch in a dingy Italian restaurant in the Strand, he with all his longings unfulfilled, and with a deeper sense of something that had been lacking in his life. Why could he not have told her all that he had felt? Why was it necessary for him to mask and screen his emotions with absurd talk that only seemed to waste precious opportunities? She rose before him in his imagination, amazingly distinct and real, no longer a shadow, but a real person. He conjured her presence at will before him, and she appeared as he liked to see her best, with her eyes grey and thoughtful, and the sunlight gilding her hair where it swept up from her white brow. Thus, when she was not there, he lived with her, and told her all the things he dared not say to her.

And nobody knew of these exquisite moments but himself. To mention her to Beaver, now, would be sacrilege. There was but one man who, he thought, would understand what was passing through him, and that was Wratten, who was away on his honeymoon.

They met several times during the next few weeks; it seemed to him that she would not consent to meet him if her heart did not echo his own. And yet, she gave no sign. There was always an air of chastened constraint about them both. He helped her adjust her fluffy feather boa once, and his hand brushed her cheek, and he remembered the feel of it, smooth and soft, like the touch of the downy skin of a peach.

All the time, of course, in the intervals of these meetings, there was the same breathless round of work to be done. Sometimes he would have to cancel their arrangements because he was given an assignment just at the very hour they had set apart for themselves—it was done by a hurried scrawl on office paper—"Dear Miss Filmer, I'm so sorry," and so forth. Once he had written "Dearest," but he tore it up, fearing he might lose her for ever. He could not risk offending her. He knew that she was rigorously strict in certain conventions.

"I say . . . may I call you Lilian?" he had asked one day, and she had glanced at him with a stricken look, and said, "Oh—please, please don't, Mr Quain." She had even laid her hand upon his, with a persuasive gesture. It was a distinct pat—the sort of pat one bestows when a child is to be coaxed into goodness.

She was very perplexing.

Her manner could alter in the most unexpected and unaccountable manner. One day she might be quite gay, and he would feel that now it was merely a question of moments before he could storm her heart and carry it: and the next time he saw her she would be strangely distant, as though she regretted the progress they had made. Or else, she would be provokingly casual, and wound him deliberately in his weakest spot. She would call him a boy, with a little smile and play of the eyebrows. Ah! that rankled more than anything she said or did, for the whole happiness of his life depended on his being taken seriously, and at his own valuation — and he valued himself as a man of the world, with the experience of double his years.

It was, perhaps, this attitude of hers towards him that made him tell her of his work, which, in these days, became so magnified in importance to him. When by virtue of *The Day* he got behind the scenes of any phase of London life, he used to make a point of

telling her just how it was done, in a rather cock-a-whoop manner.

"Do you know," she said, "we have in our office thirty men who are doing the same thing, and, in all London, there are hundreds more?"

That crushed him entirely. She thought him vain. They very nearly quarrelled seriously.

One day Jamieson, the dramatic critic of *The Day*, met him in the office. Jamieson was a tubby little man with a high Shakespearean forehead, who exuded cheeriness. He was a professional optimist. He used to depress the reporters' room with his boisterous happiness: he was so glad that the flowers were blooming, and the grass was green, and that there were children, and the joy of life, and so forth.

He accosted Humphrey with twinkling eyes. "Glorious day, Quain," he said; "makes you feel glad that you're alive, doesn't it? Ah! my boy, it's fine to see the streets on a day like this—full of pretty girls in their spring dresses."

"I don't get time to think about the weather, unless I'm writing about it," said Humphrey, with a laugh.

"Buck up, my boy," said Jamieson, patting him on the back. "You want to look on the bright side of things on a day like this. . . . By the way, would you like to have two stalls for the Garrick to-morrow. It's the same old play they've had for two hundred nights—they only want a paragraph for *The Day*. I've got a first night on at His Majesty's."

Humphrey accepted the tickets gladly, for he had a vision of an evening at the theatre with Lilian, and Jamieson went on his way, leaving in his wake a trail of chuckling optimism. It happened to be a Saturday night, when he was quite free, and so he arranged with Lilian to meet her at Victoria—she lived at Battersea Park—and

then they would have some dinner before they went to the theatre.

In those days Humphrey had not risen to the luxury of an opera hat; he wore a bowler hat, and his coat-collar buttoned up over the white tie of his evening-dress. He thrust his hands into his pockets and waited at Victoria Station for her. She was to meet him at a quarter to seven, and it was now five minutes to the hour and she had not come. He stood there, absolutely white with the tension of the passing moments. It seemed that he had been waiting an eternity, and he had lived through a thousand moments of disappointed expectation. Others who had been waiting there when he came had long since claimed those whom they had come to meet, and walked them off with smiles and laughter. He was still waiting.

Seven o'clock!

What on earth could have happened?

Visions of possible disasters crossed his mind: a train wreck and a cab accident; or perhaps she was ill and was not coming. There would be no way of communicating with him, and he would have to go on waiting. Or, perhaps, she had repented of her consent to make the evening glorious for him. The suspense was really terrible. There was nothing to do except to watch the newsboys cheerily gathering the magazines and papers together into piles, and shuttering the bookstall. He saw people running for trains, and whenever the hiss of steam announced the arrival of another train, he hurried to the wicket-gate to peer into the recesses of the crowd that struggled through it, in the hope of seeing her face a second before she actually appeared in person.

At five past seven he was still moodily waiting.

It was cruel of her to keep him dallying with patience like this. She must have known that he would be

waiting for her on the moment. How little she cared if she could not even be punctual to the time they had arranged. He began to feel stale and dusty, as if he had been in his evening-dress for years.

He made up his mind to be very angry with her when she came.

And lo! she was at his side: more wonderful than ever, so wonderful that he scarcely recognized her. She had come through the crowd at the wicket-gate, floating towards him, it seemed, like a cloud of filmy, fluffy white. Her face was radiantly flushed and smiling, and he sprang towards her with a cry of relief and gladness.

"Here I am," she announced. "I wondered if you'd be here." (As if he had not been waiting heart in mouth, for all that time.)

She wore no hat, but her hair was done in a way that he had never seen before. It seemed to change her strangely. If anything, it made her look more beautiful, as it rose in little waves from her forehead and fell about her ears in wayward threads of sparkling brown. And there was a black velvet ribbon that went in and out among the glory of her hair.

He slipped his hand beneath her white cloak that was fastened tightly to her chin, to guide her through the clumsy throng of station people. Her arm was warm and bare, as soft as satin, and there was something sacred in the very touch of it.

It was an occasion for a cab. They chattered on the way of everyday things, though all the time, with her by his side, so close, so beautiful, he could only think of Paradise.

"I thought you were never coming," he said, with a dry throat.

"Was I so late?" she asked, with a laugh. "I couldn't help it. I ran like mad, and just saw the train going out of the station."

He wanted to tell her how beautiful she looked, but just then they arrived at the little restaurant in Soho where they were going to have dinner. He went in with her, supremely conscious that every one was staring at them. There was a stuffy smell of hot food, and the tables were crowded with diners—very few of them in evening-dress. He was passed on from waiter to waiter until a table was found, and then Lilian unfastened her white cloak, and he helped her to take it off, with a queer sensation of awe and wonder. She stood before him transformed, another Lilian from the one he had known in the street where they worked. He was amazed that she did not realize how this white display of her neck and arms and gently breathing throat was dazzling him with its splendour. He was amazed that she could sit there, revealing her richest beauty for the first time, and be totally unembarrassed—as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world. . . .

The dinner was no doubt excellent, but Humphrey could not eat. He made a pretence of it, but he felt it was violating the ecstasy of these moments to eat before her. He only wanted to sit and look at her. He drank quite a lot of wine, almost a whole bottle in fact, for she took just half a glassful with water. It was cheap stuff, masquerading under the vague label of "Margaux," and it sent his imagination rioting. He was conscious of being deliciously extravagant when he ordered coffees and liqueurs, though the whole bill came to little more than twelve and six. Then they went to the theatre, and he bought her chocolates, and they sat in the stalls, side by side, for nearly three hours. He tried to appear normal—impossible! He knew what was coming: he fought against it for quite a long time, but some primeval instinct in him was stronger than his will—his hand sought hers, when the lights were low, and closed upon it. If she had withdrawn her hand, the whole castle of

his dream would have come crashing about his ears. But she did not: she let it rest there. Once or twice he glanced at her sidewise, but she seemed oblivious of him. Her gaze was fixed on the players, her lips parted with pleasure; the pendant that hung from her neck stirring gently with the movement of her bosom. She was enjoying the play, but Humphrey could pay no attention to it. He could only think of her. How real was all this: how every moment counted as a moment of pure, throbbing enjoyment. And he thought of Rivers, and the office, and Selsey and the sub-editors' room, messenger boys and the tape machines—what did it all matter beside the incomparable happiness of these moments. Knowledge came to him subconsciously: it was for this that one worked and suffered.

As they were going in the cab together to Victoria through St James's Park, where the lamps make a necklet of yellow round the dark shadows of the trees, and the moon was white in her face, he leaned towards her and kissed her on the lips. She gave a little dry sob, and her head drooped on his shoulder, so that he could bend over her and kiss her with all the impetuous longing of youth. And suddenly she shook herself free with an extraordinary melting look of tenderness and pity in her eyes. He thought she was angry, but she only smiled and patted his cheek.

And he felt as if he had passed through the portals of a new world, whose music beat gloriously on his ears, and whose colours leapt before his eyes in flashes of brilliance.

"Lilian . . . . Lilian," he whispered, calling her by her name for the first time.

"It's only for to-night," she said. . . . "Why did you kiss me?"

"Lilian," he said again.

They came out into the glare of the streets near

Victoria: romance dropped away from her as the Park was left behind. She sat upright and fumbled with her hair.

"You oughtn't to have kissed me . . . . I oughtn't to have . . . ."

The discussion of it was horrible to him. It jarred. He, too, came suddenly back to reality.

"It was only for to-night, of course," she said, with a nervous laugh.

"It's not!" he said, positively. "It's for to-morrow and for all time."

They drew up at the station. It was all over. The idyll ended in a clatter of horses' hoofs and hissing of steam, and engines whistling, and the hurrying to catch the last train.

"Look here . . ." said Humphrey, as he stood by the carriage door.

"I'm not angry," she whispered. "It was my fault."

The guard blew his whistle and waved his flag. Humphrey's heart was bursting with the hideous intrusion of modernity.

"Good-night," she said. "Good-night and thank you. It's been beautiful."

There was just a second left to him, and he made use of it. She was leaning out of the window, and he swung himself on to the footboard and whispered—

"Lilian—I love you. I'll write to you to-night."

Before she could reply, there were cries of "Stand away there," and the train swung out of the station.

That night Humphrey wrote his first love-letter, and told her all the things he had been wanting to say for weeks.

VII

THEY became engaged.

It was a secret, furtive affair, for Lilian desired it. He gave her his signet ring—a present from his father—and she wore it, though not on her engagement finger, in case people should ask questions. She gave Humphrey a photograph of herself—in evening-dress—which he carried about in his pocket-book, to take out and look at frequently. He wrote to her every night—even when they had met during the day—long, long letters full of very high-sounding sentiments and praise of her. Heavens! the pages he covered with great promises. Her letters were not of the same quality: they were rather snappy and business-like, and held in them no romance or sentiment. Now and again she called him "dear" in her letters, and sometimes "dearest," but they were for the most part inadequate letters, that made him feel as if he were being cheated out of the full measure of his love-affair.

She told him that she was five years older than he was, and it only puffed him with greater pride, to think that he had conquered her in spite of his youth.

In very truth, it was a conquest! For days and days she had withstood the eager battery of his assault on her heart. "No," she had said gently, "you're a dear boy and I like you . . . but let's be friends."

He went through all the phases of anger, sulkiness, despair and gloom, pleading with her daily, until the final exultation came. He used to see her home as far as Battersea, whenever his work allowed him freedom. There was a narrow, dark lane through which they

walked, so that he could talk in the darkness of his love for her. Always, before they parted, she allowed him to kiss her. She kissed him too, and often they stood, with beating hearts, and lips met in one long kiss. He drew her to him, yielding and supple, and told her that she must marry him. She could resist no more, she let her head sink on his shoulder, and his finger caressed her chin and neck, and they stayed thus fettered with the exquisite moments of love.

"I will be so good to you," Humphrey murmured.

"Yes . . . yes . . ." she whispered, her last resistance gone. And that was how they became engaged.

But out of the glamour of their love and kisses there emerged the grey talk of practical things. "We don't know anything about each other," she cried.

"I know you. . . . I feel that I have known you all my life!" he insisted. "Don't you feel like that towards me?" he asked, anxiously.

"Perhaps I do," she said, and Humphrey went into raptures over it. "Isn't it wonderful," he said, "to think that only a few weeks ago we were really strangers, and now you have been in my arms—how can we be strangers, Lilian, and kiss as we do?"

"Have you told your mother yet?" he asked, one day.

"No—not yet," she said.

"Oughtn't I to meet her?"

"I suppose so—wait a little longer," she pleaded. "Have you told your aunt?"

"You asked me not to. I'd love to take you down to her—she'd like you, I'm certain. It wouldn't matter if she didn't."

They made plans, of course: nothing was settled about the day of their marriage. It was a question whether life was possible for them both on three pounds a week. "I'm sure to get a rise, soon," said Humphrey.

"I'll go and ask for one, and tell Ferrol I'm going to be married. We can live splendidly on four pounds a week. Heaps of people live on less."

"I don't know. . . . It's mother I'm thinking of," she confessed.

"What about mother?" he asked.

"I'm wondering what she'll do without me."

"There are your sisters," he said. "How many are there, let me see"—he ticked them off—"Mabel, Florence, and Edith. That's enough for her to go on with."

Her face grew wistful. "Yes—that's enough," she echoed, her eyes not looking at him. "I ought to have told you, Humphrey, long before this, but mother's rather dependent on me and Edith. There's Harry, of course, but he's still at the Technical Institute—he'll be able to help some day. Florence is still at school—and Mabel—Mabel's got something the matter with her hip."

"Well, what about your father?"

She winced. "Father—father doesn't help much. He's—he's an invalid."

Humphrey was young, and this was his first love, and the more obstacles there were to overcome, the greater seemed the prize to him. "We could send your mother a little money each week . . ." he said. "It won't cost so much when you're not there."

"Yes, we could do that. And I could still go on with my work."

"What," he cried, horrified, "you go to the Special News Agency after we're married?"

"Yes, why not?"

"Oh, Lilian dear, I don't want you to do that. I want you to have a home of your own, just to sit there and arrange it as you like, and do nothing but loll in an arm-chair all day until I come home in the evening, and then we'll loll together."

She laughed. "You are a funny boy," she said. "I suppose you think a house doesn't want looking after. It's much harder work than typewriting."

"But don't you want a *home*," he persisted, mournful disappointment in his voice.

"Of course I do, dear; I know what you mean—I was only teasing you. But, I do think, for the beginning, I ought to go on with my work. It's so much safer. Supposing you get out of work, then I could keep things going for a time."

"I'm hanged if I'm going to live on you," he said indignantly.

They compromised by agreeing to the purchase of a typewriter—Lilian was to found a little business of her own that could be done at home. Plenty of people wanted typewriting, and she could earn almost a pound a week, she said, that would be enough for mother. . . .

These practical discussions were very bitter to Humphrey: they robbed the whole thing of the last vestige of beauty; they depressed him, he knew not why. She did not mean it, but everything she said, that had nothing to do with endearment and love, made him feel hopeless. He was only really happy when they rested as children in one another's arms, talking delightful nonsense between their kisses, and not thinking at all of the plans of their lives that puzzled them so much when they came to talk about them.

It was about this period that Wratten came back from his honeymoon, and asked Humphrey to come and dine with him at home, always assuming that neither of them would be kept by work. "Tommy Pride is coming if he can, and I've asked Willoughby." It happened that Humphrey was the only one of the invited guests from the office who was able to come. The news of a Regent Street burglary published in the afternoon

papers, made Willoughby champ his false teeth—a habit of his when he was excited—run his hand through his tangled hair, and depart in mysterious ways. Tommy Pride was sent to a lecture that began at eight. "Just my luck," he said to Humphrey, with a wry smile. "The missis will be disappointed."

So Wratten and Humphrey went out together. "I say," said Humphrey, on the way, "don't tell any one, but I'm engaged to be married."

"No—are you?" Wratten said. "Congratulations. When did that happen?"

"Quite recently." Out came the photograph.

"You're a lucky fellow. When are you going to get married?"

"I don't know yet—we haven't decided. Do you think we can live on three pounds a week?"

"Is that all you get, old man—you're worth more: it's a bit of a tight fit." Humphrey wondered what Wratten's salary was. Perhaps Wratten guessed his thoughts, for he said: "I don't like telling people what I get—there's a sort of secrecy about it—but, if you don't let it go any further, I'll tell you—I get ten pounds a week."

Humphrey felt himself shrink into insignificance before that mighty sum. Ten pounds seemed a tremendous salary to earn—no wonder Wratten had married. It was too much for one man's needs.

"I say, that's pretty good," he said, admiringly.

"Oh! you'll be worth more than that, some day," Wratten said. "You're the kind of chap that gets on, I can see. . . . That's why I shouldn't be in a hurry to marry if I were you," he added; "I've seen lots of fellows stick in the mud by marrying too early. It doesn't give them a chance. Marriage helps in some ways, and holds back in others . . . a man is not so independent when he marries. He has to think of others besides

himself. Unless, of course, his wife has a little means of her own."

He has to think of others besides himself!

That point of view had never come to Humphrey before. Why, he was marrying solely to please himself. Marriage seemed to him, then, necessary to the fulfilment of his dreams. Lilian was a mere excuse. He told her that he wanted to make her happy, blinding himself to the fact that he wanted to make himself happy. He was going to use her as a motive for his life, that was all. She would urge him on to success, encourage him, look after him, comfort him when he was in need of it—he had never thought of her at all, except as an accessory to his life. Of course, if anybody had told Humphrey this, at the time, he would have denied it, vehemently; protested his eternal love; sworn that she was always uppermost in his mind; and that it was his most ardent desire to work for her happiness. Love not only blinds us to the imperfections of others, but twists the vision we have always held of ourselves.

Wratten had taken a flat at Hampstead—a little box of a flat—at a ridiculously high rent, but to Humphrey, as he came into the sitting-room, it appeared as an ideal home. There was an air of repose and rest about it, the walls papered in a soft green, chintz curtains drawn over the windows, a carpet of a shade of green deeper than the walls, and old furniture about the room.

The artistic nature is always hidden below the practical journalist, and it comes to light in different ways. With some men it shows itself in a love of old books; with others, it bursts out in the form of writing other things than ephemeral newspaper "copy"; and with nearly all, the artist in them shakes itself free from its hiding-place and shines clear and strong in the home. There is no time for art during the day; no need for it, indeed. The

standard of what is good is not made by the reporter, but by the paper for which he writes.

And here, in Wratten's home, Humphrey found the vein of the artist in him, in his perception and appreciation of old furniture. He fondled his pieces. "Here's a nice little rocking-chair," he said. "Don't see many of these now."

"I like this," said Humphrey, touching another old chair.

"Ah! yes, that's a beauty," Wratten replied. "I picked that up in Ipswich frightfully cheap. It's an old Dutch back chair of the seventeenth century." He tilted it up and ran his palm over the perfect curve of the cabriole legs, entirely absorbed in the pleasure of touching the chair.

"I didn't know you went in for this sort of thing," Humphrey said.

"I've been getting things like this together for years . . . they're so restful, these old things. Can you imagine anything more peaceful than that book-case?" and he pointed to a beautiful Empire book-case, with rows of books showing through the latticed glass and brass rosettes for handles to the drawers that rested on claw feet.

The change in Wratten was really remarkable. Although he was still serious, and his face in repose was gloomy, he seemed to have lost his brusque manner. Marriage had undoubtedly softened him.

Mrs Wratten came into the room and welcomed Humphrey. Wratten slipped his arm through his wife's, and she looked up at him and smiled at him. . . . Humphrey saw himself standing thus, in his own home, with Lilian close to him, his companion for ever. It all seemed so very desirable. This little home was very compact and peaceful, thousands of miles removed from the restlessness of Fleet Street. . . .

While they were talking, a young man and a woman were ushered into the room by the little maid-servant. The likeness between the two was unmistakable—they were obviously brother and sister. The young man was the taller of the two, very slender, with the thin and delicate hands of a woman. Humphrey noticed the long fingers tapering to the well-kept nails. The face was the face of an ascetic, thin-lipped and refined. The eyes were peculiarly glowing, and set deeply beneath the overhanging eyebrows; the nose was finely chiselled; the nostrils sensitive and curling, with a faint suspicion of superciliousness. He was introduced to Humphrey as Kenneth Carr, and Humphrey knew the name at once. Kenneth Carr had the reputation of being a brilliant descriptive writer; he was on the staff of *The Herald*, but, besides that, he had written several historical biographies, many novels, and was at work on a play. He belonged to a type which is a little apart from Fleet Street, with its wear and tear—a shy, scholarly man, who found that historical biographies and novels did not yield sufficient income, and, therefore, the grinding work of everyday journalism was preferable to pot boiling. Fleet Street was, to him, a stepping-stone. He would have been happier in the editorial chair of a weekly paper, or writing essays for *The Spectator* and the *Saturday Review*, but, as it was, he threw in his lot with Fleet Street, and did his work so well that he stood at the top of the ladder. But Fleet Street had left its mark on his face—it was pale and thin, and the eyes had a strained, nervous look in them.

"Awfully good of you to ask us," he said to Mrs Wratten. "Elizabeth and I don't go out much, she gets so tired from her slumming."

His sister smiled—Humphrey saw that the handsome features of Kenneth Carr became beautiful in his sister's face. The sharp lines about the nose and mouth were softened, her eyes were bluer and larger, her face rounded

more fully, and devoid of the hollows which made the face of Kenneth so intellectual. The likeness between brother and sister finished with the lips—hers were very red, and were faintly parted, so that one had a glimpse of her teeth, like a string of white pearls. She wore her hair in two loops from a parting in the centre, and she had a habit of carrying her head a little forward, so that the outward curve of her neck was emphasized in its perfect grace.

"What does your brother mean by slumming, Miss Carr?" Humphrey asked as they sat at dinner.

"He calls it slumming," Elizabeth Carr laughed, "but it isn't exactly that. I'm rather fond of the people who have no chance in life. I want to make a chance for them." She spoke banteringly, but her eyes had a curious way of growing large and earnest as if they were anxious to counteract the lack of seriousness in her voice. "I'm trying to make a thoroughfare through the Blind Alley," she said. "Isn't it dramatic? Can't you imagine me with pick and shovel, Mr Quain."

"What do you mean by the Blind Alley?" he asked.

She suddenly became grave. "Of course, you've never thought of that—have you? It's just a phrase. . . . Some day I'll explain to you fully. It's where the people who have no chance live."

"How do you help them?"

"We don't help them much, at present—we're only beginning. It's a life's work," she said, earnestly, "and it's a work for which a life would be gladly given. You've asked me the question I'm always asking myself —How is it to be done?"

"Does your brother help?"

"Kenneth—oh, as best he can. It's the apathy that we want to overcome. That's what makes the Blind Alley." She laughed. "We'll do it some day—I don't know how—but we'll do it."

Kenneth Carr's voice drawled across the table. "Look out, Mr Quain, or Elizabeth will have you in her toils. I'll bet she's talking slumming to you. You can't be a social reformer and a reporter, you know, nowadays. The two don't hang together."

"Kenneth!" his sister said, with pretended indignation.

"Look at me! She's making me compile a book about poverty that'll be nothing but statistics—who wants them outside blue books. She's got me in her toils."

The phrase amused Humphrey: he thought of Lilian, and began comparing her with the woman next to him. Of course, they were not alike; the comparison irritated him, why compare people so entirely different. One might know Elizabeth Carr for years, and yet never *know* her; Lilian was different. She seemed simpler, and yet. . . . He wondered if Lilian had ever heard of the Blind Alley, or bothered about the people who have no chance.

When the dinner was finished, and they were all settling down to chatter, the telephone bell rang. Wratten went to answer it. "It's the office," Mrs Wratten said, with disappointment in her voice.

Wratten came back. "I'm frightfully sorry," he said. "The office wants me . . . Collard's arrested." He went over to his wife. "I shall be late, dear, don't sit up," he said.

"Who's Collard?" she asked.

"Oh! the Company promoter—reg'lar crook—but he might have waited until the morning to be arrested."

"Filthy luck!" he grumbled, as he reappeared, shouldering himself into his overcoat. "Having to leave all you people like this. . . . Can't be helped."

The maid came in with coffee. Wratten gulped a thimbleful, kissed his wife, and went out. The evening

seemed to have lost something of its pleasure with his sudden departure. They fell to talking over the ways of work and the calls of the office. It was as if Fleet Street had suddenly asserted itself, and shown the futility of trying to escape from it even for a few hours.

"Poor Mr Wratten," Elizabeth Carr sighed, "I do think they're heartless."

"Why don't you help us, Miss Carr?" Humphrey said, with a laugh. "We're in the Blind Alley too."

VIII

THE weeks passed into August, and Humphrey took eagerly all the work that was given to him by Rivers. He became a mental ostrich, assimilating all sorts of knowledge. One day, perhaps, he would have to describe a cat show at the Crystal Palace, the next he might be attending a technical exhibition at the Agricultural Hall and Olympia, and have his head stuffed with facts and figures of this and that industry. He was acquiring knowledge all day long, but it was only superficial; there was no time to go deeply into any subject, and indeed, his one object was to unburden his mind of all the superfluous things he learnt during the day. If reporters were to keep a book of cuttings of everything they wrote —and they know the value of their work sufficiently not to do that—they would be amazed, looking back over ten years (those cuttings would fill several mighty volumes), at the vast range of subjects they touched upon, at the inside knowledge they had of the little—and even big—things of life; of the great men with whom they had come into contact, perhaps for a few minutes, perhaps for a day; of the men they had even helped to make great by the magic of publicity—they would be astounded at the broadness of their lives, at the things they had forgotten long ago, and perhaps they would pity themselves, looking over their cuttings, for the splendid futility of it all.

You remember Kipling's poem of "The Files," bound volumes of past years; which are repositories of all lost endeavours and dead enthusiasm. Heaven help us when we can write and achieve no more, and the only

work of our youth and manhood lies buried, forgotten, in the faded yellow sheets of the files.

But Humphrey Quain at this period, just like every other young man, whether he be a haberdasher or a reporter, did not contemplate the remote future. He was young, and his brain was clear and fresh, and he wrote everything with a pulsing eagerness, as though it were his final appeal to posterity. He found his style improving, as he read, and his understanding broadened. He wrote in the crisp style that suited *The Day;* he had what they call the "human touch"—that was a phrase which Ferrol was very fond of using. Rivers began to entrust him with better things to do: now and again he was sent out of London on country assignments. That was a delightful business, to escape for a day or so from the office routine, and be more or less independent in some far-away town or village. You were given money for expenses, and told to go to Cornwall, where something extraordinary was about to happen, or some one had a grievance, or else there was some one to interview, and you packed a handbag, and went in a cab to Paddington, and had lunch on the train, and stopped at the best hotel, and generally tried to pretend that you were holiday making. But, more often than not, the idea of a holiday fell away when you got to the place, and you had to bustle and bother and worry to get what you wanted. Then you had to write your message, and that meant generally being late for dinner, or perhaps it was the kind of story that kept you hanging about and made it necessary to telephone news late at night.

But going out of town held a wonderful charm for Humphrey—it gave him a sense of responsibility. It made him feel that the office trusted him; somehow or other he felt more important on these country jobs, as if he bore the burden of *The Day* on his own shoulders.

There was the charm, too, of writing the story in the first person, instead of adopting the impersonal attitude that was the rule with London work; and the charm of fixing the little telegraph pass to the message, which franked it at press rates to *The Day* without prepayment. Sometimes there were other men on the same story, and they forgathered after work, and as all journalists do, talked shop, because they cannot talk of anything without it touches the fringe of their work. The men he met were, for the most part, thoroughly experienced and capable, they were tremendously enthusiastic, though they tried to appear blasé, because it was considered the correct thing among themselves. They never discussed each other's work, nor told of what they had written. Even when they met in the morning, though they had all read their colleagues' messages in the papers, and compared them with their own, they kept aloof from all reference to the merits or demerits of these messages. But it used to rejoice Humphrey's heart to see, sometimes, how older men who were inclined to patronize him as a beginner and a junior the night before, treated him as one of themselves in the morning at the breakfast-table. And he nearly burst with pride when he first saw his messages headed: "From *The Day* Special Correspondent." Even though he were no further afield than Manchester or Birmingham, it seemed to place him in the gallant band of great ones, just as if he were a Steevens, a Billy Russell, or an Archibald Forbes.

And all the time he was learning,—learning more swiftly than any one else can learn, in the school of journalism, where every hour brings its short cut to knowledge and worldly wisdom.

The occasional separations from Lilian, however, modified a little the charm of going away. These orders to go out of town had a habit of coming at the most

undesirable moments, generally upsetting any plans they had made together for spending an enjoyable evening somewhere.

"When we are married," said Humphrey, on the eve of a departure for Canterbury to describe the visit of a party of priests from France and Italy who were making a pilgrimage to the Cathedral, "when we are married, you shall come away with me. It's not bad fun, if the job isn't hard."

"I wish you didn't have to go away so often," she pouted.

There was a hint of conflict, but Humphrey was too blind to see it. He only wished he had to go away more often, for the measure of his success on *The Day* was in proportion to the frequency of special work they gave to him. "All will be well when we are married," he said, comforting her.

His love-story wove in and out of his daily work. The date of their marriage had not yet been fixed, because Ferrol was away somewhere in the south of France, and that business of the extra pound a week on his salary could not, of course, be settled until Ferrol came back. It seemed, too, that Lilian was in no hurry to be married; she loved these days of his wooing to linger, with their idyllic moments, and rapturous embraces, and the wistfulness of all too insufficient kisses.

For the period of engagement was to them a period of licensed kissing. Nor was it always possible to meet beneath the moon. Humphrey grew cunningly expert in finding places where they could kiss in broad daylight. There was an Italian restaurant in the Strand (now pulled down for improvement), which had an upstairs dining-room where nobody but themselves ever seemed to go, and then there was the National Gallery, surprisingly empty, where the screens holding the etchings gave

them their desired privacy, and on Saturday afternoon they went in the upper circles of theatres, sometimes, on purpose not to see the play, but to sit in the deserted lounges during the acting, and enjoy each other's company. Their love-affair was tangled by circumstance; scamped and impeded—they made the best of it, and lived many hours of happiness.

And then, one day, when he least expected it, she said: "I suppose you ought to come down and see mother."

Humphrey went out to Battersea to the home of his betrothed. The circumstances of his visit were not happy. It was raining, and there is no city in the world so miserable as London when it rains. The house was in a rather dreary side-street, a long distance from Battersea Park, a mere unit in the army of similar houses, that were joined to one another in a straight row, fronted by railings that had once been newly painted, but were now grimed and blackened. These houses appalled one: they were absolutely devoid of any kind of beauty, never could they have been deemed beautiful by their architect. They were as flat-fronted and as hideously symmetrical as a doll's-house; nor, apparently, did the people who dwelt in them take any pains to lessen the hideousness of their exteriors: ghastly curtains were at every window, curtains of mid-Victorian ugliness, leaving a cone-shaped vacancy bounded by lace. In the windows of the lower floors one caught a glimpse of a table, with a vase on it, and dried grass in the vase, and behind the glass panes above the front doors there was, in house after house, as Humphrey walked down the street, a trumpery piece of crockery or some worthless china statuette, or the blue vase of the front window, with more grass in it, or a worse abomination in the shape of a circular fan of coloured paper.

Number twenty-three, to be sure, where Lilian lived,

was, as far as the outside view was concerned, different from the other houses, in that there were real flowers in the window, instead of dried grass. Humphrey felt wet and miserable when he reached it ; the rain had dripped through a hole in his umbrella, and had soaked the shoulder of his coat. He went up the steps and pulled the bell. He waited a little while, and happening to glance over the railings into the area, he saw a girl of rather untidy appearance look up at him, and quickly vanish, as if she had been detected in something that she had been forbidden to do. The girl, he noticed, had the same features, on a smaller scale, as Lilian : he supposed she was Florence. Then he heard footsteps in the passage, and through the ground-glass panels of the door he could see a vague form approaching. The next moment all memory of ugliness and squalor and the dismal day departed from him, as Lilian, the embodiment of all the beautiful in his life, stood before him, smiling a welcome. How she seemed to change her personality with every fresh environment in which they met ! She was the same Lilian, yet vaguely a different one here, with her brown hair done just as charmingly yet not in the same way as she did it when they went to theatres in the evening. She wore a white muslin blouse, without a collar, and round her neck was a thin gold chain necklace which he had given her. Though he did not realize it at the time, his joy in her was purely physical ; the mere sight of her bared neck and throat and the warm softness of her body was sufficient to make him believe that he loved her as he could never love anybody else ; he sought no further than the surface ; she was pretty, and she was agreeable to be his wife. He did not stop to think of anything else.

" So it's really you ! " she said, with a laugh.

As though she had not been expecting him !

He murmured something about the weather as he

shook his dripping umbrella. She could invest commonplaces, courtesy phrases, with reality. Her eyes were tender as she said, "You poor thing." It was really fine to have some one so interested in your welfare that her eyes could show pity over a few rain-spots.

"You must come in and dry yourself over the fire. We had a fire because it is so wet."

She closed the door. He took off his coat and hat, and suddenly he caught her silently to him (her eyes spoke of caution, and looked towards the door, leading from the passage), and they kissed hurriedly and passionately. She disengaged herself, and began to talk about trivialities in a high tone. "I have not told any one yet," she whispered. "It is still a secret—so you needn't be afraid of mother." She led the way into the room. Somebody was sitting on the sofa, against the light.

"Mother," said Lilian, "this is Mr Quain."

"Oh," said Mrs Filmer, rising and coming forward to shake hands with him, "how do you do?"

Humphrey sat down in a gloomy, black horsehair chair by Mrs Filmer, who returned to a sofa that belonged to the same family. They began to talk. It was plain that Lilian's mother had been coached by her. She seemed to pay him a deference altogether disproportionate to the occasion, if he were to be considered as a mere casual visitor, a friend of Lilian. She was a faded woman of fifty years or so, the personification of the room itself, for everything within those four walls was irrevocably lost and faded—the photographs in their ugly frames were yellow and old-fashioned; the pictures on the walls, chiefly engravings of thirty years ago, in bevelled frames of walnut wood, were spotted with damp; the furniture was absolutely without taste, a mixture of horsehair and mahogany, and the piano had one of those frilled red satin fronts behind a fretted framework. There was a

blue plush *portière*, with a fringe of pom-poms down one side of it, hanging from a brass rod over the door.

It was difficult for him to believe that she was Lilian's mother: that she had actually brought into the world that beautiful, supple being whom he loved. Had she ever been like Lilian? He could trace no resemblance to her in this little thin woman who sat before him, her hands, with the skin of them warped and crinkled, crossed in her lap, her hair sparse and faded, with threads of brown showing among the grey, and the fringe of another tint altogether. She did not even talk as Lilian did: she was too careful of aspirates. He saw that she was altogether inferior to Lilian. She talked of nothing—nothing at all. And all the time she was talking, and he was answering her, he was aware, dimly, of Lilian's presence, somewhere in the background; he was conscious of her watching him, studying him.

The weather was terrible for the time of the year.

They wanted to move out of this house; it was too large for them.

It was so nice for Lilian to have such a comfortable office to work in.

But it was a long way to come home, when the weather was bad.

The weather was very bad to-day.

The summer, one supposed, was breaking up.

After all, it was not so very out of season.

Mr Quain must find his work very interesting.

And so on.

Tea was brought in by a girl who was Lilian on a smaller scale. "Edith, this is Mr Quain," said Lilian; and to Humphrey, "This is my sister Edith." She put the tray down, and shook hands limply. He noticed that she had precisely the same coloured eyes as Lilian's, but they were weaker, and she did not carry herself well. She seemed but a pale shadow of the splendid reality

of Lilian. Then Florence, the other sister, came into the room; she was the young girl whom Humphrey had seen over the railings as he stood on the doorstep. She was undeveloped, but her face and figure bore great promise of a beautiful womanhood. Her hair was of a reddish colour, and hung in a long plait down her back. Her face was quite unlike Lilian's: he judged that she resembled her father.

"You look dreadful, child," said Lilian, with a laugh. "Go and wash your face, little pig."

Florence made a grimace, and tossed her pigtail. "It's freckles," she said, hopelessly. "I've been scrubbing away for ten minutes." She looked at Humphrey appealingly, with a smile in her eyes—they all had that smile he knew so well.

"I think you're too hard on your sister, Miss Filmer," he said to Lilian, with mock gravity. (How odd the Miss Filmer sounded.) "She looks radiant. I noticed it was freckles at once." Florence went to Lilian and put her arm round her waist. They were evidently very sisterly. Edith was busy pouring out tea ("One lump or two, Mr Quain"); Mrs Filmer sat with her hands crossed in her lap looking out of the window into the garden beyond. Humphrey took a cup of tea across to her; she was too effusive in her thanks; begged him to sit down, and urged Florence to look after Mr Quain. Just then the front door clicked. "There's Harry," said Edith, putting down the teapot, and running to the door. A short, well-built young man appeared. His hair was the reddish colour of Florence's hair, and his face was frank and boyish. He was about nineteen years old, just the age of discrimination in ties and socks, and the flaunting of well-filled cigarette cases. He and Edith were apparently the greatest friends, doubtless because there was only two years' interval in their ages. Nevertheless, he pulled Florence's pigtail affectionately

and gave her a brotherly kiss; pecked Lilian on the cheek ("What a horrid collar you're wearing, Harry," she said, "and you simply reek of tobacco"), and kissed his mother on her forehead. Then Lilian introduced him to Humphrey Quain, and they shook hands and regarded each other furtively, with a constrained silence.

Humphrey felt that the whole family must know of the relations between Lilian and himself, though not one of them spoke about it. But they all treated him with a certain deference, and gave him a status in the house, which invested him with a superiority that seemed to match Lilian's. For there was no doubt of her superiority in this household, now that they were all gathered together. She seemed so stalwart and broad beside them; a creature apart from them all. She did not appear to belong to them, and yet she was, indisputably, of them. They were so commonplace, and she was so rare—at least, that was what Humphrey thought. He watched her as she moved about the room bearing plates and cups, noiselessly, gracefully; she gave him a new impression of domesticity as she wandered about in her own home without the hat that he was accustomed to see her wearing. And she gave him, furthermore, an appearance of strength and character, as though she had acquired the right to rule in this household by the might of her own toil which chiefly supported it. While she was in the room, it lost some of its faded quality, and when she left it to take a cup of tea and a piece of cake to Mabel, the third sister, who was an invalid lying, he understood, on a couch upstairs, the room became desolate, and the most insistent person was the faded mother with her querulous voice.

They made him look at picture-postcard albums and photographs, and some of Florence's drawings, while Lilian was absent. Florence wanted to be a fashion artist, and though her drawings were incredibly bad and

scratchy, he felt it was necessary for him to say that they showed promise. . . . How had Lilian grown to be Lilian in these surroundings, he wondered—surroundings of such frank ugliness and shabby gentility?

He glanced out of the window which gave a view of a narrow oblong garden at the back, where a few stunted wallflowers struggled to live. A patch of unkempt grass ran between the high walls, and there a broken wicker-work chair faced the windows. As he looked out he saw a man stumbling over the grass towards the side door: he caught a glimpse of the soiled and frayed clothes, and feet clothed in down-at-the-heel slippers, of a grey face with shrunken cheeks, and pale blue eyes that peered weakly from beneath grey wiry eyebrows. The man came across his vision like a spectre, trailing his slippered feet one after another, and swaying a little as he walked. He was fascinated by the sight, and suddenly his attention was distracted by Lilian. She had come back to the room, and was standing at his side. Her eyes had followed his, and she knew what he had seen. "Will you have some more tea?" she said, abruptly, touching him on the shoulder. He turned away hastily: his eyes met hers; they held a challenge in them, as though she were daring him to speak of the man in the garden. It was as if he had probed into a carefully hidden secret.

He knew, without being told, that this aimless, shambling man with the slippered feet was the father. He was given in a moment the explanation of this room; the mother; the invalid child; and the air of subdued failure that brooded over the house. He saw Lilian as a regenerating, purifying influence, trying to lift them out of the slough. Their eyes met, and though no word was passed between them, he understood everything.

He wished that he had not come to this house. This family depressed him, and made him feel afraid of Life.

It was an odd thought that haunted him: they would be his relations when he married Lilian.

But when, after the leave-takings, she came to the door to help him on with his coat and let him out, he realized that she was unchanged, that she was still splendid for him, and as desirable as she had always been. He felt something of a hero, because he was going to rescue her from this dreadful home of hers. . . .

The memory of the father dogged his thoughts as he came away. He wished he had not gone to the house.

IX

AT eight o'clock, on a chill morning, the women in the red-brick cottages of Hyde, which are built round the Hyde collieries, felt the earth quiver beneath their feet, and heard a low roar, reverberating about them. Their hands went up to their beating hearts; they rushed to their windows that overlooked the grey wastes where the shafts of the mines stood gaunt against the horizon; they saw a burst of flame leap from the upcast shaft of No. 3 mine; leap vividly for a swift moment, and leave behind it a vision of a twisted cable-rope, and twisted iron, and the flame that vanished swiftly bore with it the souls of two hundred men: their husbands, their sons—their men. They gathered their shawls about them, and ran, with their clogs clattering on the cobbled streets, to the pit-mouth, joining a stream of men, whose eyeballs shone whitely from the grime and black of their faces—they ran with terror clutching at their hearts and fear at their heels, and every lip was parched and dry with the horror and dread of the moment. There had been a disaster to No. 3 pit: an explosion; a fire—"What is it? Tell us?" They crowded round the mine offices, besieged the mine manager: "For the love of Heaven, for the mercy of Mary, for the sake of Christ—tell us! We must know . . . we are the wives, the daughters, the mothers of those who went below to their work in the blackness of the coal. . . . No need to tell us: we know, now; we see the thin cloud of smoke, with its evil smell, floating above the shaft . . . the engine-room is silent. The ventilation fan is not working. It has been shattered, with the lives of all those who matter, by this explosion.

"Yes, yes, we will wait. Some of our men are sure to have escaped; they know the workings. They will find their way to the Arden mine shaft adjoining, and come up in the cages. Perhaps they all will, and no lives will be lost. We will wait . . . "

At eleven o'clock the little tape machines in the newspaper offices printed out letter by letter the message that was sent by the Hyde reporter, who overslept himself that day, and did not hear the news until ten. "An explosion occurred in the No. 3 mine of the Hyde Collieries this morning. Two hundred men were working at the time, and it is feared that there has been a serious loss of life."

"Off you pop," said Rivers to Wratten, who had just arrived at the office. "This looks big. I think you'd better have some one with you. Boy, tell Mr Quain to come up."

Half an hour later Wratten and Quain were on their way in a cab to Euston, Humphrey thrilling with the adventure of being chosen to accompany Wratten, looking forward to a new experience. "Horrible things, these mine disasters," said Wratten. "I hate 'em," as if any one in the world was so misguided as to like them.

"Are they difficult to do?" asked Humphrey.

"Sometimes . . . it depends. If there's a chance of rescue, you've got to hang about sometimes all night. They get on my nerves. This'll be your first, won't it?"

"Yes," Humphrey said. It seemed strange to him that they should be discussing such an appalling disaster so dispassionately; considering it only from their point of view. There was no sense of tragedy, of deep gloom, in their talk. It was all part of their business—a lecture, a murder, an interview, a catastrophe—it was all the same to them. They were merely lookers-on.

When they arrived at Euston, a tall man, whose chief characteristics were gold-rimmed spectacles and a black moustache, came towards them. He wore a red tie and

carried a heavy ash stick in his hand. "What—ho! Wratten," he said, jovially, "coming up?"

"Hullo, Grame," said Wratten, "anybody else here yet?"

"Oh! the whole gang. We're for'rard in a reserved compartment."

Kenneth Carr, white-faced and breathless, arrived at the last moment. "Hullo!" he said, "isn't this awful. . . . Two hundred men! I'll join you as soon as possible."

"Poor Kenneth!" Wratten remarked to Quain, as they followed Grame to the carriage. "He really feels this quite keenly. He realizes the immensity of the tragedy to which we're going to travel. It's a mistake. It hampers one."

"I should have thought it would make you do better work," Quain answered, "if you really felt the tremendous grief of it all."

"Not a bit. It makes you maudlin. You lose your head and go slobbering sentimental stuff about. Remember, you're no one—you don't exist—you're just a reporter who's got to hustle round, find out what's happened, and tell people how it happened. Never mind how it strikes you—*The Day* ain't interested in you and your sensations—it wants the story of the mine disaster."

"But—" Humphrey began.

Wratten turned on him savagely. "Oh! Good God! don't you think *I* feel it too? Don't you think I hate the idea of never being able to write it as I see it? By God! I wouldn't dare tell the story of a mine disaster as I see it. *The Day* would never print it—it would be rank socialism."

There were five other reporters in the carriage. Two of them Humphrey had met before: Mainham, who wore pince-nez, looked like a medical student, and spent every Saturday at the Zoological Garden, where he discovered

extraordinary stories of crocodiles, who suffered from measles; he was, in a way, the registrar of births, deaths and marriages among the animals; and Chander, a thin-faced, thin-lipped young man, who wore long hair, whose conversation was entirely made up of a long chain of funny stories.

Chander faced the little tragedies of his work daily, but he kept himself eternally young by pretending only to see the humorous side of things. For instance, he once spent a whole morning in the rain and slush of a January, trying to verify some story. He tramped the dismal pavements of a dirty street off Tottenham Court Road, in search of a certain man in a certain house, finally gave it up in disgust, and discovered that he should have gone to another street of the same name by King's Cross. That would have disheartened the average man: but Chander turned it into a funny story—it is good to have the Chander point of view.

The other reporters were Thomas, who worked for *The Courier*—a penny paper—a well-ordered, methodical, unimaginative man, who had a secret pity for the poor devils who had to work for halfpenny papers; and a big broad-shouldered man, whose name was Gully. His face at a glance seemed handsome enough, until you noticed the narrow eyes and the coarseness of the heavy under lip. He had brought a pack of cards with him and wanted to play nap.

"Good heavens!" said Kenneth Carr, irritably, "try and behave as if you had some decency left. We're going to a mine disaster. There's two hundred dead men at the other end of the journey."

"Well, you do talk rot," Gully replied. "Are they relations of yours?" He sniggered at his joke, and asked Mainham to play. Mainham said he couldn't play in the train, but Thomas was willing. Chander, who knew that Kenneth Carr loathed Gully and all that he stood

for, joined the party out of sheer good-nature. He hated quarrelling.

"Why look on the black side of things, Carr?" he said. "Perhaps they're not dead at all. We needn't go into mourning until we know everything, and we don't know anything except what the early editions of the evening papers had. And newspapers are so inaccurate."

"Ass!" said Kenneth, with a grin, for he and Chander were good friends, and he understood Chander's tact.

Gully shuffled the cards. "I hope they're dead," he said, "because then we shall be able to get back to-morrow."

Kenneth Carr, Grame and Wratten looked at each other. Wratten gave his head a little toss, and made a clicking noise that meant, "What can you expect, after all, from Gully."

"Charitable soul," Chander said, admiringly. "What a sweet temperament you have. Won't it be sad if you find 'em all alive and ready to kick!"

Kenneth Carr, Wratten, Mainham and Humphrey went into the dining-car, as the express rocked northwards towards Luton. The journey was full of apprehension for Humphrey; he had never been on such a big story as this, and, though he knew he had to do nothing but obey Wratten, there was still a doubt of success in his mind. It interfered with his appetite. He marvelled that the other men could eat their food so calmly, as though they were going on a pleasure trip, and talk of ordinary things. Of course, they were thoroughly used to it. It was as common an incident in their lives as casting up columns of figures is to a bank clerk, or the measuring of dead bodies to an undertaker.

After luncheon, Mainham left them to go back to the carriage, and the three friends were alone over cigarettes and coffee.

"I'm sorry I lost my temper with Gully," Carr said, after a pause.

"Oh, we all know Gully." Wratten smiled and sipped his coffee.

"Don't get like Gully," Kenneth said to Humphrey, "even if you feel like him. It's bad; it's the Gullys that have brought such a lot of disrespect on journalism. He's the type of journalist whom people think it necessary to give 'free' cigars to, and 'free' whiskies and sodas; 'free' dinners, even. They think it is the correct thing to give 'free' things to us, as one throws bones to a dog. It's the Gullys who take everything greedily and never disillusion them."

"But don't you think you're too sensitive?" Humphrey ventured. "It seems to me that the work we do demands a skin thick enough to take all insults. Look at the things we have to do sometimes!"

"It's our business to take risks," Wratten interposed. "I don't mind what I do, so long as there's a good story in it. If it's discreditable, the fault isn't with me. I'm only a humble instrument. It's *The Day* who's to blame —*The Day* and the system. I do my duty, and any complaints can be made to Neckinger or Ferrol, with or without horsewhip. That's my position."

"You see," Kenneth Carr said, musingly, "there are, roughly, three classes of reporters. There's the man who is keenly alive to the human side of his work and talks about it, as I'm afraid I do; there's the man who feels just as keenly and shuts up, as you and Wratten and Mainham and hosts of others do; and there's the chap, like Gully, who hasn't an ounce of imagination, and gloats over things like this mine disaster, because he's a ghoul. I envy people like you and Wratten. You do the best work because, although you feel pity and sorrow, you never allow these feelings to hamper your instincts of the reporter."

Humphrey smiled. "Wratten doesn't." The time passed in recounting some of Wratten's audacious doings.

His bullying a half-suspected murderer into a confession; his brutal exposure of a woman swindler—he had answered an advertisement for a partner in some scheme or other, found the advertiser was a woman with a questionable commercial past, pretended he was *bona fide*, and, when he had obtained all his material, ruthlessly exposed her in *The Day*. There was the case of the feeble-minded millionaire, who was kept a prisoner in his house. There was the case of the Gaiety girl who married a lordling, and Wratten pried into their private lives, forced the lordling into an interview, and wrote a merciless story that made London snigger. He was absolutely callous in his work, yet so human and tender-hearted out of it. Humphrey, since that night when he had been helped by him, had looked up to Wratten as the type of the ideal reporter, with courage unlimited, who never flinched, even when the work was most unsavoury and humiliating.

He was not popular with the reporters of the papers: he kept himself away from them, and restricted his friendship to one or two men. The reason of his unpopularity was simply because others feared him as a rival, and Humphrey found, later, that there was merit in that sort of unpopularity. The strong men are never popular.

The train had now sped past Rugby, and the green valleys and chequered landscapes ran by in a never-ending panorama. The sunshine held with them as far as Crewe, and then, as they came into an unlovely stretch of land bristling with factory chimneys, the clouds gathered, and the greyness settled over the day. The three friends sat silently now: Wratten and Carr, seated opposite, were looking out of the window, and Humphrey over Carr's shoulder caught glimpses of the little world to which they were journeying. He saw the great brick chimneys everywhere now, breathing clouds

of foul black smoke, and then, wherever he looked, the strange-looking gearing-wheels of the coal-mine shafts came into view. Some of them were quite near the railway line, and he could see the light twinkling between their spokes as the great shaft wheels moved round, hauling up invisible cages. There were tangles of iron-work, and buildings of grimy brick, and, as they rushed on, they passed gaunt sidings where coal-stained trucks waited in a long line.

They were in a world of brick and iron and coal: down below them, beneath the throbbing wheels of the express, the earth was a honeycomb of burrows, where half-naked men sweated and worked in the awful heat and close darkness. This was a hard world, spread around them, a world where men lived hard, worked hard, and died hard. A world without sunshine,—all grimy iron and coal and brute strength. And again Humphrey could not help feeling the pitiful artificiality of his own work, that mattered so little, compared with this real and vital business of dragging coal from the heart of the earth to warm her children.

They had to change at Wigan: the bookstalls were covered with placards of Manchester and Bolton newspapers telling of the horror of the disaster. They bought copies of every paper, and saw the whole terrible story, hastily put together, and capped with heart-rending headlines. They would have to wait thirty minutes for the train to Hyde: Wratten twitched Humphrey's sleeve and drew him aside. "Look here," he said, "I don't know what the other fellows are going to do. Trains are no good to me—I mayn't be able to get back to Wigan to wire, and the Hyde post-office will be a one-horse show. I'm going to get a motor-car. Come on." So they left the group. Social friendship was at an end: there were no "Good-byes," each man was concerned with himself and his own work.

Motor-cars were not used by newspapers at that time to the extent that they are used to-day; they were doubly expensive, and even a little uncertain, but *The Day* was always generous with expenses when it came to getting news.

They went outside, and Wratten hailed a dilapidated four-wheeler. "Drive to a motor garage—quick," he said.

"Won't t' old hoss do, guv'nor?" asked the cabby, with the broad Northern accent.

"No, it won't, and look slippy," growled Wratten. The old cab rattled over the stones and down a steep hill.

"This is a pretty dull hole," Humphrey said, looking out at the town, which seemed to be oozing coal from all its pores.

"Yes," Wratten said shortly. "I'm trying to think out a plan. You'd better come with me to Hyde, and after we've got some stuff for the main story, you can hang on, and I'll bump back here in the car, and put it on the wire. Then I'll come back to the mine and relieve you. You'll probably have got some interviews by then, and we can run them on to the story."

They arranged for the motor-car, and during a ten-minutes' wait, Wratten dashed off to the post-office. "Always call at the post-office when you get on a job like this, and tell them what you're going to send. Besides, the office may have some instructions for you in the poste restante. And always wire your address to the office. We'd better stop at the Royal. I daresay every one else will be there, but it can't be helped."

They set out in the evening for the mine. The car took them through the mean streets of Wigan and the outlying villages, where the shadow of disaster hung like a black curtain over the houses. The streets were strangely silent: groups of men stood at the street

corners, talking in constrained voices, and women with shawls over their heads flicked across the roads, grey and ghostlike, the slap of their clogs breaking harshly into the silence. Now and again they passed a beer-house, brilliantly lit, and from here came sounds of voices, and high nervous laughter. "They always get drunk on days like these," Wratten said. "They have to forget that death is always sitting at their shoulders."

And now there was a stretch of open country, yet even the fields had not the bright green of the Southern fields. The very grass was soiled with the coal, and the mines and the tall chimneys made a ring round their horizon. Humphrey moved uneasily in the car: the brooding spirit of tragedy that hovered over the place was beginning to seem intolerable. It was all so grey, so appallingly dismal and squalid. Here were the houses with the blinds drawn over their windows—whole streets of them—houses where there was no man to come home now. Here were women leaning over the railings of the patches of gardens, staring before them into the desolate future. Fatherless babes crawling about the dusty pavements and gutters, unheedingly, knowing nothing of the disaster that had scorched and withered the mankind of their world.

They turned down a side-street, and came out upon an open space filled with a mighty crowd of people. Behind them was the gate that led to the colliery, and far away, above their heads, Humphrey saw the winding wheel above the shaft, twisted and broken, the shaft itself jagged and castellated where the force of the explosion had torn the brickwork, and the cable-ropes shattered and tangled, as if some giant hands had wrenched it loose and made a plaything of it.

The crowds before the gate parted as they heard the noise of the motor-car. They made a narrow lane, just wide enough for the car to creep through. The

gate was guarded by a police-sergeant, who, overcome by the sight of the motor-car, opened the way, and saluted: Wratten, bulky with rugs and wraps, touched the peak of his cap. The car drew up outside the offices, and they set out to walk up the black hill to the pit-mouth.

Desolation, utter and dismal; the lowering sky stained and splashed with the red of the dying sun; dark masses gathering below the purple pall of clouds; the ground barren and black with coal beneath the feet: these were Humphrey's first impressions as they walked up the hill, with thousands of envious, resentful eyes regarding them from the crowds that huddled beyond the railings. Nobody questioned them; nobody asked them what right they had to be there. They were part and parcel of the scheme—the literary undertakers, or, if you like, the descendants of the bards of old, the panegyrists, come to sing their elegies to the dead.

The full force of the tragedy came, as a blow between the eyes, when they reached the pit-mouth. Those women, waiting patiently throughout the day,—and they would wait, too, long into the night, keeping up their vigils of despair—who could forget them? Who could look at their faces without feeling an overwhelming gush of pity flooding the heart; those eyes, red-rimmed and staring intensely, eyes that could weep no more, for their tears were exhausted, and nothing but a stony impassive grief was left! The shawls made some of the faces beautiful, Madonna-like, framing them in oval, but others were the faces of dolorous old women, grey-haired, and mumbling of mouth. And some of them laid their forefingers to their lips, calling the world in silence to witness their stupendous sorrow. They stood there compact and pitiful: thinking of God knows what—perhaps of the last good-bye, of a quarrel before parting, of a plan for the morrow, of all the little last things

that had been done by their men, before death had come.

And, permeating everything, into the very nostrils of all of them, there crept a ghastly smell of gas and coal-dust—a smell that brought to the vision of the imaginative the shambles in the twisting galleries of coal below their feet; great falls of black boulders, nameless tortured hulks that once were men—living, loving, laughing—lying haphazard as they fell to the same gigantic fist that smote the iron wheel above the shaft, and crumpled the brickwork as if it were cardboard.

They had to see it all: they met other reporters wandering in and out—dream-people in a world of terrible reality. Their companions of the train were all there: Kenneth Carr, surveying that wall of women silently; Mainham, talking to the mine-manager, whose black and sweating face told of many descents into the mine; Gully, buttonholing a woman with a baby in her arms, and making notes in his notebook; Grame, plodding to and fro in the coaly mire, for it had been raining that morning in the North: all working, all observing, all gathering facts. It was not their business to moralize, to link up dead men and disasters with the idea of these desolate women and humanity at large. That was the leader-writer's work. Their business was to get the news and say how it happened. They dared not even expose criminal negligence, or inhuman cruelty, or savage conditions of work—and libel laws were there to restrain them.

And they all felt—yes, I believe even the brutal Gully felt it for a moment—the unspeakable horror of the tragedy, the injustice not of men dying like this, but having to live like this; great waves of sympathy and pity came over them, and they pitied themselves for their impotence. Ah! if they could have told the millions that would read their writings in the morning, the thoughts that were in their minds . . .

Humphrey saw it all. He saw the gaunt, drear shed where the flickering lamp-light played over a dozen shapeless bundles sewed up in white. A man came to the shed—this business of identification was no woman's work—the policeman in charge whispered something: they went in together; the policeman turned back the sheet—O God! is it possible that a face once human could look like that! Turn down the sheet. We cannot recognize him. All we know is that the bundle of clothes seared from his body is his; that pocket-book is his too, and we recognize the bone crucifix that he bought one Easter-tide in Manchester.

"Hold up. . . . Thanks, matey, the light's a bit dim . . ."

An odour of carbolic mingled with the stench of the coal-dust; a blue-clad nurse with a scarlet cross on her arm moved among the white bundles, and she seemed to bring with her a promise of exquisite peace after pain, and rest and eternal sleep. Outside, a grim black wagon lumbered up the hill, and, as the wind flapped its canvas doors open, one saw its load of coffins . . .

Now the rescue party was going down again. They emerged from a brick shanty, through whose windows Humphrey could see the shelves which were meant to hold the miners' lamps—there was a pathos in those empty shelves. These men were going down to dare death: they looked inhuman fantastic creatures, with goggled helmets over their heads, and great knapsack arrangements of oxygen and nitrogen to breathe, for one breath of the air in the mine below meant stupor and sleep everlasting. There were five men, and as they passed the group of dolorous women, they must have felt the tremor of hope and deep gratitude that shot through the fibre of every despairing one. Here were the sexes in their elemental state, stripped of all the artificial trappings of civilization; men were doing

the work of men; women giving them courage with the blessings of God that they murmured.

The leader of the rescue gang carried a little canary in a cage; the little yellow bird piped and sang, and hopped about his perch. The little yellow bird was the centre of all their faith in God's mercy: for if the bird could live in the air of the mine, there was still some hope for their men.

Slowly the cage descended the shaft that was unbroken. The sunset blinked between the spokes of the gearing-wheel, slower and slower—they were at the bottom of the mine. Now, they were in that inferno of vaporous blackness, with death stalking them, a gaunt, cloudy monster, who had but to puff out his cheeks and breathe destruction. There would be enormous falls of coal and timber to combat; they would have to crawl on their bellies, and stagger along, stooping to the broken roofs of the galleries, and always there was the startling danger of a jar knocking their knapsacks, or breaking the mouthpieces through which they breathed their precious elixir of life.

Up above, the night was coming, and a rain as soft as tears began to drift downwards. The women waited. Salvation Army officers moved among them, enticing some of them into the shelter of the silent machine-room. "Of what use is tea and coffee to us? Give us our men. No food or drink shall pass our lips until our men have kissed them, or we have kissed their still faces."

Up above, a preacher preached of the infinite mercy of God, and the gospel of pain and sorrow by which the Kingdom of Heaven is reached. He stood there with his arms outstretched, like a black cross silhouetted against the darkening sky, his low, mournful, dirge-like voice blending with the gloom. . . . Down below, in the reek and the stench, the rescuers' hands are bloody with

tearing their way through obstacles, and their pulses are hammering in their heads . . . and they have seen sickening things.

Now the wheel begins to move again. Doctors hurry to the door of the cage—lint, bandages, stretchers, evil and glittering instruments that kill pain with pain, all the ghastly paraphernalia of Death. They are coming up! . . . They are coming up! . . . A silence, so swift and sudden, that it is as if the great multitude had whispered "Hush," the tinkle of the bell marking the stages of the ascent is clearly heard by people waiting on the bank. The cage appears. . . . The men stagger out, one by one, helmets removed, their faces grimed and sweaty, their eyes white and staring out of the black grotesquery of their faces, their lips taut and silent.

And one of them carries a cage in his hand, a cage with an empty perch, and a smother of wet and draggled feathers huddled into one corner. A world without the song of a bird—no hope! . . . no hope.

"I shall have to dash back to Wigan now, and get my stuff on the wires," said Wratten. "Will you wait here and I'll come and relieve you. Pick up any stuff you can. Facts." Humphrey wandered about the dismal pit-mouth—sometimes he was challenged by the police, and ordered to keep within a certain area He found a cluster of reporters by a lighted lamp. One of them had received an official communication from the mine-manager, and he was giving it to his colleagues. Humphrey took it down in his note-book. Then there was another flutter. A piece of flimsy paper was fixed to a board outside the lamp-house. A message from the King.

Now, the wires were humming with words, thousands upon thousands of words sent by the writers to all the

cities of the kingdom. And in all the offices the large square sheets of the press telegraph-forms were being delivered. Humphrey saw the picture of *The Day* office: Selsey sitting at the top of the table, the boy handing him the pile of news from Wigan, a sub-editor cutting it down, here and there—always cutting down. Perhaps, you see, some great politician was making a speech at the Albert Hall, and space was needed for three columns, with a large introduction.

It was nine o'clock. Another rescue party had gone down. The women still waited, their faces yellow now in the flare of lamps. It seemed to Humphrey that he had left London centuries ago . . . that he had never met Lilian at all. It was as if that morning his life had been uprooted, and it would have to be planted again before it could absorb the old interests and influences. . . . He was hungry and cold. There was no chance of getting food. If he were a miner, or had any real part in this game, the Salvation Army would have given him tea and bread . . . but he was a reporter, an onlooker, supposed to be watching everything, and, in a sense, physically invisible.

A car panted up. . . . It was Wratten. "Here I am, Quain. Anything happened? Official communication. Oh yes, and the King's telegram. Better send them off. Hop into the car and then send it back for me. I'll wait."

"Wait?" Humphrey said. "What about food?"

"I've got some sandwiches. I'll wait here until two. Never know what will happen. Rescuer might get killed. It's happened before. Fellow might be brought up alive."

"But it's going to rain like blazes."

"Is it? . . . Off you get. You can turn in. I'll keep the deck."

It was nearly eleven when Humphrey had sent his

telegram to London. The post-office was open by a side door for the correspondents, and some of them were still writing. Cigarettes dangled from their lips. They had an opened note-book on one side and a pile of telegraph-forms on the other — not the forms that ordinary human beings use, but large square sheets, divided up into spaces for a hundred words on a page. Fifteen of them made a column in *The Day*—Wratten had covered thirty forms.

Humphrey went back to the hotel. His friends were in the coffee-room amazing the waitress with their appetites for cold meat and pickles and beer at half-past eleven. The tension was over, and the reaction was setting in. Their faces were strained, and they all seemed unnaturally good-humoured. They laughed at anything, clutching at any joke that would make them forget the dismal horrors of their day. Kenneth Carr looked more pallid than ever.

"Where's Wratten?" he asked, as Humphrey came into the room.

"Still waiting up there," Humphrey said.

"What's the good of waiting?" Gully put in. "If anything happens, the Agency men will send it through, and, anyway, it's too late for the first edition."

"I reckon I've done my day's work; me for the soft bed," Chander remarked. "By the way, I found five separate men who've got five separate shillings out of me. Each swore he was absolutely the first person to arrive on the scene and no one else there. It's a sad world. Good-night."

Kenneth Carr left shortly afterwards, and the others remained drinking and telling stories. Humphrey had been chary of drinking since his adventure that evening when he was on his first murder story, but to-night he drank with the rest. They were all urged by the same motives. They wanted to forget the black pit-mouth,

and the women, and the smell of the coal-dust.

That night Humphrey woke up suddenly and heard the rain drumming against the window. He wondered if Wratten were back from the mine. He fell asleep again, and dreamed of a gaunt building, where a blue-clad nurse, with the face of Lilian, hovered about white, shapeless bundles. . . . And in London the dawn was coming westwards over Fleet Street, and the vans were rattling to the stations, so that all that had been written would be read over millions of breakfast-tables every-where in the kingdom.

X

SINCE his visit to Lilian's home, he had come to a definite decision about his marriage. It would have to be privately done, and the news kept from his aunt until they were wedded. In spite of the increasing breadth of his life, he had not yet shaken off the narrow influence of Easterham; his aunt still remained as a factor to be considered in his scheme of things. If he told her, beforehand, she would ask all sorts of questions. Who were the Filmers? What did Mr Filmer do? (He winced at even this imagined question.) Were they *really nice* people? That was the greatest quality that anybody could have in his aunt's estimation—the quality of being *really nice*. It was a vague, impalpable quality that defied definition, though Humphrey knew that, somehow or other, his aunt would arrive at the conclusion that the Filmers had not that desirable attribute, if she could by any chance visit them.

Of Lilian, of course, there could be no doubt. . . . She was rare and exquisite, so different altogether from the rest of her family. Nobody could help loving her, and he knew that she would survive the Easterham inquisition. But he saw at once that Mrs Filmer and his aunt would never, never blend. She would find out at once that Mrs Filmer was not "really nice." . . .

He and Lilian talked it over, whenever they could meet. She did not share his hurry to be married. "It is sweet like this," she said once. There was an odd, wistful note in her voice. Then she looked at him fondly, and, "Oh! what a boy you are, Humphrey," she said. He did not object to that so much now. He smiled

indulgently—he had not been many months in Fleet Street, but he seemed to have absorbed the experience of as many years.

He was changing, so gradually, that he could not note the phases of his development himself. He felt that he was leaving all his old associations far behind. It was as if some driving power were within him, rushing him forward daily, while most of the other people round him stood still. There was Beaver, for instance—he seemed to have left Beaver long ago, though they were still at their old Guilford Street lodgings. But, somehow, Beaver seemed now just a milestone, marking the passage of a brief stage in his life. Soon, he knew, Beaver would be out of sight altogether. There was Tommy Pride—another milestone; he had run on and caught up with Wratten and Kenneth Carr, and these were the people who were influencing him now. . . .

And there was that great ambition, growing into a steady flame: ambition burning up every other desire within him; ambition leading him by ways that mattered not so long as they led at last to conquest.

Lilian was to help him: she was to be a handmaiden to ambition. The picture of the journalistic homes that he had seen made him long to found one of his own. This life of lodgings and drifting was profitless—he wanted a home; permanence and peace in this life of restless insecurity. Very often he dreamed of his home—where would it be?—they would have to be content with rooms at first, an upper part, perhaps, but the rooms would be their own, and they could shut the door on the world, and live monarchs of their own seclusion for a few hours, at least, every day. There were walls lined with books, too, in his picture of the home, and Lilian, in an arm-chair of her own, set by the fireplace, and the blinds down, and the light glittering on the golden threads in her brown hair.

He told Lilian of his dreams, and she shook her head and smiled.

"It's a nice picture, isn't it?" she said.

"Don't you see it too?" he asked.

"Sometimes. I used to see it quite a lot at one time. Before I knew you."

He showed chagrin. "Oh! wasn't I in it?"

"How could you have been when I hadn't met you? I forget who was the ideal for me at the moment. Lewis Waller, perhaps, or William Gillette." She laughed. "Silly Humphrey, it's the picture you're in love with, and you can put anybody in the arm-chair."

He protested against it, yet all the while he was wondering how she could have known that! He had not considered that point of view himself, nor would he now. It was Lilian he wanted; she was just as beautiful as ever, and nobody else was within his grasp.

He sighed. "I do wish we could settle about—about our marriage. Let's fix it up for next week."

She pretended to be horrified. "Only a week to prepare in! Look at the things I've got to buy. My bottom drawer isn't half full."

"Well!" he said, hopelessly, "when are we going to get married? Do let's try and fix a day."

He could not understand why, sometimes, she would seem so eager and delighted with the prospect of marriage, and at other times she would be in a mood for indefinite postponement, as though she wished to keep him for ever lingering after her with all his thirst for love unquenched.

He could not know that she was beginning to realize, with that intuition which no man can fathom, that her dreams had been but dreams, and the love that they thought everlasting but the passing shadow of a moment.

When he got back to the reporters' room that even-

ing—he had been reporting the visit of a famous actress to a Home for Incurables—Willoughby met him with a grave face.

"Heard about Wratten?" he asked.

"No—what is it?" Humphrey said, feeling that evil news was coming.

"Double pneumonia—they thought it was a chill at first . . . he got it at that mine disaster last week. You were there, weren't you?"

"Yes. He would insist on staying out all night . . . it was raining . . ."

"That was Wratten all over," Willoughby said.

Humphrey winced. "Don't say 'was,'" he said, almost fiercely. "Wratten's going to get better. It's impossible for him to die . . . why, he is only just begun to live . . . and there's his wife . . . and, perhaps . . ."

He stopped short. Nobody could quite understand what Wratten meant to him. Not even Wratten himself.

"I didn't know you and Wratten were very thick," Willoughby said. "He's a good chap, but so devilish glum."

"None of you know Wratten—I don't suppose I do—but I know that he's the whitest man in the Street."

He went out to Hampstead that night, after work, but the nurse who came to the door said that he could not see Mrs Wratten, she was in the sick-room—Mr Wratten was dangerously ill; but he was going on as well as could be expected.

XI

FERROL was back in his room, among his buttons, after a long holiday abroad. There was always a subtle difference in the office when he returned after these occasional absences; and not only in the office, but in the whole Street, where men would say to each other, "Ferrol's back, I hear . . . wonder what *The Day* will do next." For Ferrol always returned to his paper with some new scheme, some new idea that he had planned while he was away—he seemed to be able to see weeks ahead, to know what people would be talking about, or, if he could not be certain as to that, he would "boom" something in *The Day*, and its mighty circulation would make people talk about anything he wanted them to discuss. They were doing nearly a million a day—think of it! Ferrol, sitting in his office, could touch a button, give some instructions, and send his influence into nearly a million homes. He could move the thoughts of hundreds of thousands; throw the weight of *The Day* into a cause and carry it through into success. He could order the lives of his readers, in large matters or small matters. That famous Batter Pudding campaign, for instance, is not forgotten, when *The Day* found a crank of a doctor, who declared that our national ill-health was due to eating Batter Pudding with roast beef. Batter Pudding was on every one's lips, and in no one's mouth. People stopped cooking Batter Pudding. Ferrol touched a button and they obeyed. Nor must we forget the wonderful campaign on the "Bulrush Throat," by which Humphrey was able to oust the bulrushes from Mrs Wayzgoose's sitting-room.

Yet, sometimes, in *The Day* campaigns, there was a spark of greatness and a hint of nobler things, that seemed to reflect the complex personality of Ferrol himself; Ferrol groping through the web of commercial opportunism which was weaving round him, striving after something ideal and worthy. A man has been wrongly arrested and condemned—Ferrol stands for justice; the columns of *The Day* are opened to powerful pens; the nation is inflamed, there are questions in the House, the case is re-opened and the conviction quashed. Nameless injustices and cruel dishonesty would flourish if *The Day* were not there to expose such things. You must balance the good against the evil, and perhaps the good will outweigh the evil, for Ferrol, when he touched the buttons, did many good things, and the nearest approach to evil he made was in doing those few things that were transparently foolish. . . .

Something in *The Day* had arrested his attention that morning. (He always read the paper through, page by page, from the city quotations to the last word on the sporting page.) The article in question was not an important one: it was a few hundred words about a party of American girls who were being hustled through London in one day—the quickest sight-seeing tour on record. The account of their doings was brightly written, with a flash of humour here and there; and, you know, it had the "human touch."

Who wrote it? The button moves; pink-faced Trinder starts nervously from his desk in the ante-room, and appears shiny, and halting in speech. He is sent on a mission of investigation, while Ferrol turns to other matters: the circulation department wants waking up. Ferrol actually travelled in his car all the way from his house in Kensington, and for every contents bill of *The Day* he saw three of *The Sentinel*. Gammon, the manager of the circulation department, appears, produced

magically by touching a button. "This won't do, you know." There are explanations, though Ferrol doesn't want explanations—he wants results; which Gammon, retiring in a mood for perspiration, promises. There has been a slight drop in advertisement revenue—Ferrol has a finger in every pie. "Dull season be damned," says Ferrol to the advertisement manager—a very great person, drawing five thousand a year, commissions and salary, and with it all dependent on Ferrol. In two minutes Ferrol has produced a "scheme"—an idea that may be worth thousands of pounds to the paper. "Splendid," says the advertisement manager. "Get ahead with it," says Ferrol . . .

In ten minutes it is as if there had been an eruption in every department of the grey building. The fault-finding words in the red room with the buttons drop like stones in a pool, making widening rings, until they reach the humblest junior in every department—Ferrol is back, and the office knows it! . . .

Trinder reappears. Mr Quain wrote the article . . . and Ferrol suddenly remembers.

So the boy has been doing well. Both Neckinger and Rivers approve of Humphrey. "Not a brilliant genius, thank God!" says Rivers, "but a good straightforward man. Very sound."

Thus is Ferrol justified once more in his perception for the right man. His thoughts travelled back once more to Easterham, to the days when he himself was Humphrey's age, to the days of Margaret, and the white memories of his only romance. Strange that the vision of her should always stand out against the thousand complexities of his life after all these years. He saw her just as he had last seen her, eyes of a deep darkness, and black hair that seemed by contrast to heighten the dusky pallor of her skin. A child that was too frail to live, and yet she had inspired him in these long distant days.

It was astonishing to think that she had had a separate life of her own; that she had married and passed out of the scheme of things. She was dead, and yet she came knocking like this at queer, irregular intervals, at the door of his life.

And Ferrol was drawn with a strange attraction towards this boy who was her son; he came as if he were a message from Margaret, holding out her hands to him, across the unfathomable abyss of Space and Time. "Now you can repay," she seemed to say.

"Well, Quain," said Ferrol, as Humphrey came into the room.

Ferrol masked his sentiments behind the crisp, hard voice that he always cultivated in the office. Nobody could have guessed from his treatment of Humphrey that he regarded the boy with any particular favour. Ferrol knew well enough how to handle men: they must be made always to believe that they are firm and independent, and it does not do to let them see the props and supports that hold them up.

Humphrey was busily searching for the reason of this summons to Ferrol's room. It was only the third time that he had been in this broad red room, yet, already his nervousness vanished, he no longer feared his greatness, or the comprehensive power of the man with the black moustache and the strong hands that held in their grip all the fortunes of *The Day*. He stood there, by Ferrol's desk, so changed, so different from the timid Humphrey who had felt the floor sinking beneath him when he faced, for the first time, this man whose potentiality he could not grasp. There was little outward difference, save, perhaps, the lips compressed a little tighter, and a frown that came and went, but inwardly the timid Humphrey had gone, and in its

place there was a bolder Humphrey, whose mind was all the better for the bruises of battle.

"Well, Quain," said Ferrol, moving papers about his desk, and regarding Humphrey all the time with those penetrating grey eyes.

"You sent for me, sir?" Humphrey asked.

"Yes." Ferrol paused. "Getting on all right?" he blurted out.

Humphrey smiled — Getting on! The phrase had been on his lips on that day when he had first appeared in the red room. He thought of all the things that had been crowded into his life since then. Of all that he had seen; of all the people he had met; of the glimpses into the greatness and the pettiness; the worthiness and the unworthiness; the virtue and the vice and the vanity of it all. As he thought thus, he saw a blurred composite picture of the past months, figures flitting to and fro, men striving in the underworld of endeavour, work, work, and a little love, and, in the background, a whimsical picture of his aunt who preached the stern gospel of Getting On, without knowing what it really meant.

"I'm going to have you put on better work," Ferrol said. How the boy's eyes sparkled and lit up his face! "Mr Rivers is quite satisfied. You shall do some of the descriptive work. Think you'll be able to do as well as John K. Garton one day?"

John K. Garton!—he was the great descriptive writer of *The Day*, the man who signed every article he wrote, who was never seen in the reporters' room, except when he looked in for letters; a being who seemed to Humphrey to belong to quite another sphere, above Wratten, above Kenneth Carr, above all the reporters in salary and reputation. He was one of Ferrol's products: all England knew of him, and read his work as special correspondent, yet Ferrol could put a finger on a button, you know ....

Humphrey laughed. "Oh, I don't know, Mr Ferrol,"

he said, awkwardly. "My work would probably be quite different, I couldn't write in his style."

"That's right," said Ferrol. "Try and find an individual style of your own. No room for imitators here. Still, there's plenty of time to talk about that. I just wanted to let you know I've had my eye on you." Ferrol nodded, Humphrey turned to go.

Then he remembered he was going to ask Ferrol for a rise in salary. He came back to the desk.

"Oh, Mr Ferrol," he said, "I ought to tell you, I'm going to be married."

Ferrol pushed his pad aside. What a fool he had been to think he could constitute himself the only influence in this boy's career. How was it he had overlooked the one important factor—a woman. It came so suddenly, this revelation of Humphrey's intimate life, and all at once Ferrol found himself swayed with an unreasoning dislike of this unknown woman—it was an absurd feeling of jealousy.—Yes, he was jealous that anybody should exercise a greater influence than himself over Humphrey, now that he had decided to push him forward to success.

"Married!" he said, harshly, "you damned young fool!"

The words came as a blow in the face. Humphrey flushed, and found that he could not speak. He thought of Ferrol's soft words that had opened up such illimitable visions of the future, and then, quite unexpectedly —this.

"Somebody in Easterham?" asked Ferrol.

"Oh no! Nobody in Easterham. She lives in London. She's in Fleet Street."

"A woman journalist?"

"No—she's a typist."

"You damned young fool!" Ferrol repeated. "What do you want to get married for?"

XII

In the silence that followed, Humphrey stood bewildered. The harsh note in Ferrol's voice surprised him ; what on earth could it matter to Ferrol whether he married or not. And Ferrol must have read his thoughts, and seen his mistake at once.

"Of course," he said, "it's no business of mine. Your life's your own. Only I think you're too young for that sort of thing. Why, you haven't seen the world yet. You haven't a father, have you?"

"No," said Humphrey.

"Well"—Ferrol's voice softened—"you won't mind my advising you then."

"No," said Humphrey again: already he seemed to feel Lilian slipping from his grasp.

"I'm looking at it simply from the business point of view. No man has a right to marry until his position is made—least of all a reporter."

"But she would help me," Humphrey pleaded. "She would be able to help me. She would . . ." he broke off.

Ferrol completed the sentence for him. "Keep you straight. Yes, I know. I've heard it all before. The man who needs a woman to keep him straight is only half a man."

"But," continued Humphrey—and he thought of Wratten and Tommy Pride—"we don't get much out of life—we're at work all day long, there's absolutely nobody . . . I mean, there's nothing left in it all . . ." he spread his hands wide. "At the end there's nothing . . . emptiness." He stammered broken sentences

that had a queer impressiveness in them. "I'm nothing . . . it seems to me . . . all this life, rushing about all day . . . and everything forgotten to-morrow . . . there's nothing that lasts . . . nothing except . . ."

"Oh, you think you'll get happiness," Ferrol said. "Perhaps you will. But every moment of happiness is going to cost you years of misery. As soon as you marry, what happens? You are no longer independent. You've got to lie down and take all the kicks. You've got to submit to be ground down; to be insulted by men whom you dare not strike back, as you would, if you had only yourself to think of. . . . And then, you know, in a year's time, you've got to work . . . double as hard, and to watch every penny, and to save. . . . Why, you young fool, don't you see that if you're going to get on in this business, you mustn't have any other wish in life but to rise to the top. Everything must be put aside for that—you must even put aside yourself. You must have only one love—the love of the game; the love of the hunter for his quarry."

What made Ferrol talk like this. . . . What had happened to Humphrey that he should be there, standing up to Ferrol, fighting the question of his marriage? Something new and unexpected had thrust itself into their relations, and Humphrey could not understand it.

"But that's what I want to do," he said; "we should do it together."

"Yes. How?" said Ferrol, a little brutally again. "Shall I tell you? I know you young men who marry the moment you see a marrying wage. It's all very well for you—you may progress—you may develop—you're bound to, for men knock about and gather world experience. But what of the woman at home?—cooped up in her home with babies? Eh? have you thought of that? Where would your home be? You haven't got as far as that, then. The woman stands still, and

you march on. She can lift you up, but you can't lift her up. And then the day comes that you're a brilliant man—the most brilliant man in the Street, if you like . . ." Ferrol smiled. "Oh! you never know. Think of John K. Garton, and Mallaby, and Owers. . . . And you're different. You can link up the things of life. You can perceive and appreciate pictures and fine music and the meaning of everything that matters . . . and for the woman who has not been able to progress, nothing but popular songs, chromographs, and ignorance of anything but the petty little things of to-day. Then you hear people saying, 'How on earth did he come to marry her?' There's always an answer to that. *He* didn't marry her. It was another man—the man he was twenty years ago—who did it. Do you see?"

Humphrey looked about him forlornly. His dreams were crumbling before the onslaught of Ferrol's remorseless words. The powerful magnetism of this man held him: he felt sure that Ferrol was right. . . . Ferrol was only voicing the thoughts that he himself had feared to express. Above the inward turmoil of his mind, he heard again the voice of Ferrol, forceful and insistent:

"You are not the man you will be in twenty years' time. There's no reason," he added hastily, "why I should take all this trouble over you . . . no reason at all . . . it's no concern of mine. Other people on my staff can do as they please—for some men marriage is the best thing . . . I don't interfere. I'm not interfering now. I'm only giving my point of view."

"Yes . . . I know," Humphrey said, and somehow or other he seemed to feel an extraordinary sympathy for Ferrol; he seemed to understand this man. At that moment he would have stood forth for Ferrol and championed him against a world of hatred!

"Only I thought . . ." Humphrey began. "You see, she supports her family . . ."

"O Lord!" Ferrol groaned. "It's worse than I imagined."

"Besides, she's . . . she's clever . . . we have the same tastes."

"Of course you have. But your tastes will alter. You're going to progress. . . . And she's going to progress, too, on different lines. . . . A woman's line of progress is different . . . and in twenty years' time!"

The telephone bell rang. Ferrol took up the receiver.

"Well, that's all," he said to Humphrey. And then: "I don't take this trouble with every one."

Humphrey groped for words. "No . . . I understand . . . I see what you mean. . . . You don't think . . ."

Ferrol nodded. "You can do what you like, of course."

He put the receiver to his ear and began talking rapidly.

XIII

LILIAN knew the letter by heart now, she had read it through and through so often. She had received it early that morning, when, as usual, she ran downstairs at the postman's knock, so as to take that precious letter, that came daily, from the floor where it lay as it had been dropped through the slit in the door. Of late, the sisters and brother had noticed the hurry to capture the first post, and there had been a little good-humoured chaffing over the breakfast-table, where they all sat together—the father and mother took their breakfast upstairs in bed, in keeping with their slatternly lives.

"Going to be a blushing bride soon, Lily?" said Harry, with a wink to Edith.

"Don't be silly!" Lilian said, crumbling her letter in her pocket.

"What's he like? Is it that nobleman who came here a few weeks ago? If so, I don't think much of his taste in ties!"

"It's better than your taste in socks," retorted Lilian.

"Aha!—a hit, a palpable hit. Guessed it at once. Pass the butter, Edie."

"Do tell us all about it," Florence urged.

"The family wants to know," pleaded Harry.

"Lilian—are you really . . ."

Her hands closed over the letter which she had just read. She turned her head away and pretended to be busy at the coffee-pot. They were all joking among themselves, and they did not notice the tears glisten in her eyes.

"There's nothing to tell," she said, in a hard voice.

"Oh, we don't believe that!" Harry said. "Young ladies wot gets letters in masculiferous handwritings every morning . . ."

She rose abruptly and looked at the clock. Then—wonderful Lilian!—she laughed and threw them all off the scent. "You children are too talkative," she said, with pretended loftiness. "I mustn't stop chattering with you or I shall miss the eight-forty." She put on her gloves with precision, and took up her little hand-bag, and adjusted her hat, just as if nothing had happened to disturb the ordinary course of her life; and, then, with the usual kiss all round, she let herself out of the house.

Oh, she kept herself well in hand throughout the journey to town—nobody knew, and nobody must know. It was only a secret between herself and her heart. She looked out with dry eyes over the dismal plain of chimney-pots with which the train ran level, the cowls spinning in the wind . . . the chimney-pots stretched row upon row, far away, until, with a hint of the open sea, adventure and wide freedom, the masts and rigging and brown sails arose from the ships lying in the docks. But when she came to the office she rushed upstairs, and in the little room where they hung their cloaks and hats, all her pent-up emotions broke loose with a torrent of tears. She wanted to empty her eyes of tears so that there should be none left, and she wept without control, silently, until she could weep no more. It was just like a short, sharp storm on a day that is oppressive and heavy; the air is all the cooler and sweeter for it, fresh breezes play gently over the streets, the world itself seems eased after its outburst.

She could smile again. She bathed her red eyes in the cold water of the basin, and performed some magic with a powder-puff. Nobody would have guessed, as she sat tap-tapping at her typewriter, with the sunshine

touching her hair with its golden fingers, that a thunderstorm had shaken her nature a few minutes earlier. It was all over now; only the letter remained, and she knew the letter by heart, she had read it so often.

A difficult letter to write! Well, not really, for that which comes from the heart is easy to write. It is insincerity which presents difficulties, and in this business Humphrey had not been insincere. He had not made any cold calculations as to the future; he had not weighed the pros and cons of it all. After the letter was written and posted, the vision of her reproachful face haunted his dreams, and he felt that he had lost something irretrievable—something of himself that had gone from him, never to return.

He was only considering himself. He saw the sudden possibilities of the future which Ferrol had opened for him; the true proportions in which he had painted that picture of the days to come. The fear of these responsibilities attacked him and made him a coward.

He saw, at once, that he could not marry Lilian, and he told her so in a tempestuous, passionate letter, with ill-considered phrases jumbled all together, treading on one another's heels, as fast as the ideas tumbled about in his mind.

"I cannot do it, Lilian, dear," he began. "We should never be happy together. I can see that. I don't know what you will think of me; you cannot think any worse of me than I think of myself. I feel a blackguard; I feel as if some one had given me a beautiful, priceless vase, and I had hurled it to the floor and smashed it. It is not that I love you any the less, but I cannot ask you to share this life of mine. When I first knew you, I thought it would be beautiful if we could be married—everything seemed so easy to accomplish. But now I see that years must pass before I win my way, and that marriage for

us would be an unhappy, uphill affair. Forgive me, forgive me, Lilian. I cannot tell you all my thoughts on paper. But meet me just once more in the old restaurant in the Strand, where I can explain to you all that I want to say, and plead for your forgiveness. Oh, my sweet Lilian, you will understand and help me, I know.

"HUMPHREY."

This was the letter, written on the impulse of the moment, which Humphrey sent to her. Incredible that it should be dropped in the ordinary way into a pillar-box, to lie for hours with hundreds of other letters, to pass through many hands until it finally came into the hands of the postman at Battersea Park, who delivered it, without any emotion, with a score of bills and receipts and circulars.

Well, it was done, and, while Humphrey was waiting for his work in the reporters' room of *The Day*, Lilian's mind was busy with the new development of affairs. Now, she could review everything calmly, she felt in her heart that Humphrey was right, but there was the sense of wounded pride with her. He had thrown her over! He did not even ask her to wait for him—yes! she would have waited—he was hasty to unburden himself and win his freedom again. Yet she knew that she could not wait—she was older than he—she would be too old in ten years' time. The flower of her life would be full for a few years, and then she knew he would see that her glory was waning. . . . All this was no surprise to her. Instinctively she seemed to have known that this would be the outcome of her love affair. Strange! how she accepted it without any more demur than the natural outburst of tears—and what were those tears, after all, but tears of self-pity, as she looked upon herself and saw that she was poor and patient and loveless?

They met in that same Italian restaurant in the

Strand to which Humphrey had first taken her on that day, months ago, when the glamour was upon him. The proprietor knew them for more or less regular customers, and they always had the upstairs room, which was invariably empty.

This dreadful business of the waiter taking his hat and stick, setting the table in order, offering the menus, and recommending things, with a greasy smile, and knowing, dark eyes! They had to mask their feelings, and to play the old part, and pretend that they were going to have lunch.

She noticed that Humphrey's face was pale, the lines about his mouth less soft than usual. His eyes were strained, and he looked at her wistfully, not quite sure of his ground, wondering whether there would be a scene.

She could read him thoroughly. She knew that he really felt mean and uncomfortable, that she had but to use her woman-wit to recapture him at once—snare him so completely that never could he escape again. She knew that the very sight of her weakened him in his resolve, a kiss on the lips, and her fingers stroking his hair and face, he was hers, and the world well lost for him.

But that was not Lilian's way. A strange, deep feeling of pity was in her heart as she marked the pallor of his face. She would have mothered him, but never cajoled him. "He is only a boy," she thought sorrowfully, "with a boy's destructiveness. This, that he thinks is an overwhelming tragedy, will be only a mere incident in a few years' time." And she smiled at her thoughts.

Her smile awoke only the faintest echoes of dying memories within him: her smile that had once thrilled him, and sent his heart beating faster, and made his throat so curiously parched—incredible that such things had happened once!

"You are not angry," he said, timidly, with a touch of tragedy in his voice.

"Angry?" she echoed. (He feared she was going to make light of the whole affair, and trembled at the idea of her mocking him: he might have known that that also was not Lilian's way.) "Angry," she repeated. "No, Humphrey. I'm not angry."

"There's no excuse," he began, hopelessly, "I've got nothing to say for myself. . . . It seems to me . . . it seems best that it should be . . . . for both of us, I mean."

"I think it's better for me," she said, softly. "There's no good making a tragedy of it. Things always turn out for the best."

He fidgeted uneasily. "I was thinking it over last night. . . . Oh, my head aches with thinking. . . . You see, what can we do, if we married. Everything's up against us . . . . it's all fighting and risks, and uncertainty. I don't mind for myself" (and Humphrey really believed this, for the moment), "it's you that I'm thinking of . . . . it wouldn't be fair. I could ask you to wait . . . ." he did not finish.

Now, really, Humphrey's arrogance must be taught a lesson. Behold, Lilian gathering her forces together to crush him—ask her to wait, indeed! as if he were her last chance. And then something in his eyes checked her, something wistful and intensely pathetic. Splendidly, Lilian spared him. He was so easy to crush . . . perhaps she still liked him a little, in spite of everything.

"No," she said. "There's no need to do that. We'll each go our own ways."

The waiter, after discreet knocking at the door, came between them with plates of food and clatter of knives and forks. They regarded him silently, and when he was gone, they made a feeble pretence of eating.

"I ought to have known better," she said, returning

to the business again with a wry smile. "I ought to have known it couldn't have lasted."

"It isn't that I love you any the less," he said, unconsciously quoting a phrase in his letter. "I don't know how to explain my attitude. . . . I love you just the same . . . but, somehow . . ."

"Don't, don't explain," she interrupted. "I understand. Of course it's impossible if you think like that. And, of course, Humphrey, there's no need to talk of love. . . ." She laughed a little, and then, really, she could not spare him any more. "Oh, what a boy you are!"

He flushed hotly. "I know you've always looked upon me as a boy." he said. "You think I'm a child . . . but it takes a man to do what I'm doing . . . it takes courage to face it out . . . it hurts."

"Oh, you *are* a boy," she said, with a little hysterical laugh. "Of course you're only a boy." She pushed her plate away from her. "Don't you see what you've done —you've broken up everything."

And she put her head on her arms outstretched on the table, and sobbed and sobbed again.

He watched her shoulders tremble with her sobs, and heard her accusing words repeat themselves in a pitiful refrain in his ears. At that moment he touched, it seemed, the lowest depths of meanness. He felt awkward and foolish. . . . She was crying, and he could do nothing. "Lilian . . . Lilian," he pleaded, touching her hand that was flat on the table. "Don't— I didn't mean to." Heavens! if she did not stop, he would snatch her to him, and kiss her hotly, and let Ferrol and the world and all its success go by him for ever.

The waiter saved the situation. His knock came as a warning, and when he entered the room with more plates and a greasier smile, he found the lady at the

window flinging it open widely and complaining of the heat, the gentleman looking moodily before him, and the food barely touched.

"You no like the fricassee, sare?" he said, turning the rejected food with his fork.

"It's all right," Humphrey said, in a voice that the waiter knew to mean "Get out." "No appetite to-day."

Lilian turned from the window, as the door closed behind him. Her eyes and lips were struggling for mastery over her emotions, and the lips conquered with a wan, watery smile. She placed her hand on Humphrey's shoulder. "There," she said, wiping her eyes, destroying the tension with a prosy sniff. "It's all over—I didn't mean to be so silly."

The miserable meal went on in silence. There was nothing more to be said. He was thinking of all this pitiful love-affair of his, how it ran unevenly through the fabric of work and hopes, beginning at first with a brilliant pattern—a splash of the golden sunrise—and gradually becoming worn, until now all the threads were twisted and frayed. After this, they would part, never to meet again on the old terms, never to recapture the thrill of early love. Odd, how she who had lain so close to his heart, enfolded in his arms, would have to pass him in the street henceforth, perhaps with only a nod, perhaps without any recognition at all. And nobody would know, nobody would guess of their shipwrecked love.

"I'm glad I never told mother," she said once, voicing her thoughts. She took a little package from her pocket: it held the few trinkets he had given her, wrapped up in tissue-paper—a brooch or two, a thin gold necklace with a heart dangling from it, and his own signet ring.

"No . . . no . . ." he said; "for God's sake, keep those. I should be happier if you kept them."

She shook her head gently. "I could not keep

them," she said. "They were little tokens of your love . . . they belong to you now."

There was a pause. The clock chimed two. The disillusion was complete, all the fine draperies of love had been wrenched away—they were so flimsy after all — and behind them reality stood, sordid and ashamed. She tried to strike a note of cheerful fatalism.

"Well, what must be, must be," she said, reaching for her cloak. He sprang to his feet to help her, remembering how, in other days, his hand had touched her cheek, and he had urged her lips towards him, that he might kiss her. How calm and self-possessed she was now! How magnificently she mastered the situation—a false move from her and the moments would become chaotic. He was uneasy, awkward and embarrassed . . . one moment, ready to snatch her to his arms and begin all over again; the next, alertly conscious that he was unencumbered, that henceforth there was no other interest in his life but work—free!

Now she was ready to go.

"I won't come down with you," he said, "I'll say good-bye now." He could not face a parting in the street. He watched her gather her things together, her bag, her umbrella, her gloves . . . she smiled at him, and now the smile was a riddle: he could not guess her thoughts: contempt or pity?

Suddenly she bent down towards him, stooped over him, with her face aglow with a divine expression, virginal and tender, the light of sacrifice in her eyes, the sweet pain of martyrdom on her lips; she bent towards him and kissed him lightly on the forehead.

"Good-bye, Humphie dear."

She had never spoken with a voice like that before, she had never shown how much she loved him, and all the misunderstandings, the torment, the doubts and

uncertainties were washed away as his thoughts gushed forth in a great appreciation of his loss.

The next moment she had gone.

He was alone in the room, with her good-bye ringing in his ears. Idly he fingered a little packet of tissue-paper, opening it and laying bare the little pieces of metal that were all that remained to him of his love.

He touched the presents that he had given to Lilian —each one held memories for him. . . . The gold signet ring had belonged to his father. . . . If only Daniel Quain had been there, with his world-wisdom and philosophy . . .

Tears, Humphrey? Surely, not tears! Think how splendidly free you are now; think of the moment of triumph when you can go to Ferrol and tell him that you are no longer hampered; see how straight the path that leads to conquest.

XIV

THAT night, in a little box of a flat in Hampstead, a man was fighting his last battle, with the fingers of Death at his throat and the arm of Love for his support. It was a sharp, short battle, ended when the night itself finished, and the dawn came through the chinks in the shutters, as pale and as cold as a ghost.

This was the end of Leonard Wratten, whom so few people understood, who had always kept his own counsel, so that only he himself knew of his own struggles and ambitions—they were just like Humphrey's, just like those of every other man in the Street. He had not asked much of life, and all that he asked for was given him, and then snatched away.

They talked about it in the Pen Club, and in the offices. "Overwork," they whispered. "He was just married." Ferrol rose to the occasion: wrote handsome cheques for Mrs Wratten, straightened out affairs, sent her flowers, arranged for her to take a sea-cruise . . . did all that he possibly could, except bring Leonard Wratten striding back to life again.

But there was one in Fleet Street who followed the coffin to the cemetery, who seemed to feel that he alone had understood Wratten. ("It's always the best fellows that are taken," they said, when he was gone, as they say of every one.) And, as he came away from the cemetery in the sunshine when the coffin had been lowered into the grave, and scattered with lilies, he knew that he had lost friendship inestimable, for it had not had time fully to develop and ripen.

Wratten's death, and the break with Lilian, came hard upon each other: he felt that the roots of his life were stirred, two influences of such potent possibilities had gone from him. He knew that a phase of his life was closed.

PART III

ELIZABETH

I

THE Pen Club stands far away from Clubland up a narrow court that leads from Fleet Street, into the maze of the little streets and courts that finally emerge on Holborn.

It is the hidden core of newspaper land. It lurks behind the newspaper offices with discreet ground-glass windows, unpretentious, and obscurely peaceful. No porter in brass-buttoned uniform guards its doors—indeed, it has but one, and that a door with a lustrous, black-glass panel, with a golden message of "Members Only" lettered upon it. Strangers and messengers are requested to tap gently on the window of a little pigeon-hole at the side.

Oliver Goldsmith once lived in the house that is now the Pen Club; Dr Johnson lived a few courts away, and strode down Fleet Street to the "Cheshire Cheese," little dreaming that Americans would follow in his footsteps as pilgrims to a shrine. Its courts have had their place in the history of our letters, but all that is past, for journalism affects a contempt for literature, and literature walks by with a high head. If you want literature, and art, and high-thinking, you must go further west, along the Strand, where you may find a club that still clings to the traditions of Bohemia: but if you want to meet good fellows, jolly, generous, foolish men, wise as patriarchs in some things, and like children in others, then you must join the Pen Club.

All around it are the flourishing signs of the journalists' trade. Here a process-block maker; there a lesser News Agency; round the corner a large printing

works, and almost opposite it the vibrating basements of *The Day*. You can see the props of the scenery—take a stroll through the courts, and you see the back-doors of all those proud newspaper offices, great rolls of paper being hoisted up for to-morrow's issue, dismal wagons piled high with yesterday's papers, tied up in bundles, "returns"; unsold papers that will be taken back to the paper-mills and pulped: food for the philosopher here!

Humphrey Quain joined the Pen Club when he had been three years in Fleet Street. It was Willoughby, the crime enthusiast of *The Day*, who put his name down; Jamieson, the dramatic critic, seconded him.

Two years had made very little outward difference in Humphrey. He had perhaps grown an inch, and his shoulders broadened in proportion, but his face was the same frank, boyish face that had gazed open-mouthed in Fleet Street on that January day. Yet there was some slight change in the expression of the eyes; they had become charged with an eager, expectant look; observation had trained them to an alertness and a strained directness of gaze. Inwardly, too, the change in him was imperceptible. He had lost a little of that cock-sure way of his, and acquired, by constant mingling with men older than himself, a point of view and an understanding above his years. In worldly knowledge he had advanced with large and sudden strides: some call it vice and some call it experience. A young man, thrust into the whirlpool of London, finds it difficult to avoid such experience, and so Humphrey had allowed himself to be tossed hither and thither with the underswirl of it all, learning deeper lessons than any man can teach.

He had come out of this period with a sense of something lost, yet never regretting its loss. Sometimes a bitter spasm of shame would overtake him when he thought of the sordid memories he was accumulating.

He could have wished it all undone, and he looked back on the Humphrey Quain of Easterham, and saw himself singularly unsmirched, and innocent—knowing nothing, absolutely nothing. After all, he thought, was *this* knowledge? Does all this go towards the making of a man, as the steel is tempered by the fire? Humphrey did not know . . . he took all that life offered him: the good and the bad, the folly with the wisdom.

That affair of his with Lilian Filmer was now nothing more than a memory. They had never spoken since their wretched meeting in the Strand restaurant. It was strange, too, how rarely they had met, when in the old days scarcely a day seemed to pass without the sight of her in Fleet Street. She still worked in the Special News Agency Office, and yet, during the two years that had passed since their parting, he had not seen her more than four or five times, and then only in the distance. Once he found himself marching straight towards her in the crowd of the luncheon-hour walkers: panic seized him; he did not know what to do. She was walking proudly with the erect carriage of her body that he knew so well—and then, almost mysteriously, she had disappeared. Perhaps she had seen him, and avoided a direct meeting by turning down a side street or by passing into a shop. For a year he always walked on the other side of the street during the luncheon hour. At the back of his mind she lived as vividly as she had lived in the days when she had been the most important factor in his existence. There were times when the thought of her rendered him uneasy; he felt he had not been true to himself, there was a reproachful blot on his escutcheon. . . . Strange! how lasting his love had seemed that night when he had kissed her in the cab after the theatre. He could look back on it all now dispassionately. There had been progress in the office. His salary was now eight pounds a week. He remem-

bered the day when he had gone to Ferrol, and said, a little miserably, for the strain of the breaking with Lilian pressed hardly on his heart in those days: "I've broken off my engagement." In these words he had dedicated himself to Ferrol and *The Day*. Nothing more was said. Ferrol nodded in a non-committal sort of way. A few weeks later Humphrey was sent to the East Coast on special work. He did well, and the increase in salary came to him at last.

With this he lifted himself out of the old ruck of his life. The money opened up unbounded vistas of wealth and new possibilities to him. He decided to leave Beaver and Guilford Street. Beaver, as an influence, had served his turn in shaping Humphrey's career. It was Beaver who first showed him the way to London, and now, at odd intervals, Beaver occurred and recurred across his vision, still biting his nails, and still with ink-splashed thumbs. No stress of ambition seemed to disturb Beaver's placidity. He was content to plod on and on, day after day, a journalistic cart-horse, until he dropped dead in his collar. That was how it seemed to Humphrey, who never credited Beaver with any great aspirations, yet that shaggy man had a separate life of his own, with his own dreams, and his own aims, which one day were destined to touch the fringe of Humphrey's life.

Humphrey took a small flat in Clifford's Inn, a place of sleep and peace and quiet then, as it is now, out of the noise of Fleet Street. It was a "flat" only by courtesy, for in reality it was made up of two rooms and a box-room. The larger was his sitting-room, and the smaller—a narrow, oblong room—he used as a sleeping apartment. Very little light, and scarcely any air, came through the small latticed windows, but the rooms held a mediæval charm about them, and he was free for ever from the landladies and grubbiness of lodgings. He paid a pound a week for his rooms in Clifford's Inn.

Every evening when he was free in London, Humphrey went to the Pen Club. The place had a fascination for him, which he could not shake off. One could not define this fascination, this influence which the Club wielded over him.

It grew on him gradually, until an evening spent without a visit to the Club seemed empty and insufficient. There was nothing vicious about the Club—it was just a meeting-place, where one could eat and drink. Within its four walls there was peace unutterable; and the world stood still for you when you passed the threshold. Other clubs have tape machines spitting out lengths of news: telegrams pasted on the walls; chairs full of old gentlemen reading newspapers with dutiful eagerness—the Pen Club was a place where you escaped from news, where nobody was interested in news as news, but merely in news as it stood in the relation to the doings of their friends. There was no excitement over a by-election, nobody cared who would get in on polling day; nobody thrilled over a revolution in a foreign state; mention of these things only served as a peg on which to hang discussions of personalities. "I expect Williamson's having a nobby time in St Petersburg," or "Who's down at Bodmin for *The Herald*—Carter?—I thought so. Jolly good stuff in to-day."

And when news did touch them, it touched them personally, and altered the tenor of their lives perhaps for many days. At any minute something would happen, and a half-dozen of them would be wanted at their different offices. They would just disappear from the Club for a few days, and return to find that a fresh set of events had dwarfed their own experiences completely. They were never missed. A man might be absent in Morocco for half-a-year, living through wild happenings, with his life hanging on a slender thread—a hero in the eyes of newspaper readers—but nobody in particular in

the eyes of the Pen Club, where every one found his level in the fellowship of the Pen. They came and went like shadows.

Humphrey found all types of journalists in the Pen Club—odd types off the beaten track of journalism, guarding their own cabbage-patch of news, and taking their wares to market daily. There was Larkin, for instance, who took the railway platforms as his special province. He was a tall, thin man, with friendly eyes smiling behind gold-rimmed pince-nez. No Duke or Duchess could leave London by way of the railway termini without Larkin knowing it. Those paragraphs that appeared scattered about all the newspapers of London, telling of the departure of Somebody and his wife to Cairo or Nice marked the trail of Larkin's day across the London railway stations. Then there was Foyle, a chubby, red-faced man, with a jolly smile, who, by the unwritten law of Fleet Street, chronicled the fires that happened in the Metropolis. A fire without Foyle was an impossible thing to imagine. There was Touche, who dealt only in marriages and engagements; and Ford, who had made a corner for himself in the Divorce Courts; Chate, who sat in the Bankruptcy Court; Modgers, who specialized in recording the wills and last testaments of those who died; and Vernham, lean, long-haired, and cadaverous, who was the Fleet Street authority on the weather. These men and others were the servants of all newspapers, and attached to none. In some cases their work had been handed down from father to son; they made snug incomes, and though they were servants of all, they were masters of themselves.

And all these men were just like children out of school, when they met in the Pen Club: there was no grim seriousness about them—they kept all that for their work. They had insatiable appetites for stories, for reminiscences of their craft. They knew how to

laugh. It was well that they did, for, if they had taken themselves seriously, they would never have been able to face the caricatures of themselves which hung on the walls. These caricatures, drawn by a cartoonist on one of the dailies, were things of shuddering satire: they were cruelly true, grotesque parodies of faces and mouths, legs and arms. If you wanted to know the truth of a member, all you had to do was to consult the wall, and there you saw the man's character grimacing at you in colours.

Humphrey had been away from London for a week, and he came back to find the Club seething with excitement. The moment he crossed the threshold he was aware of something abnormal in the life of the Club.

It was the last night of the Club elections for the Committee—a riotous affair as a rule. All round the room there was the chatter and buzz of members discussing the new spirit in the Club.

As member after member dropped in, the excitement grew. It was a historic election. For the first time the youngest members of the Club had been nominated to stand on the Committee. The older members, the men who had watched the Pen Club grow from one room in the second floor of a house to two whole houses knocked into one, looked on a little sorrowfully. They had not become accustomed to the new spirit in the Club. Among themselves, they said the Club was going to the dogs. These young men were making a travesty of the whole business. They had no reverence for traditions. After all, the election of a Chairman and a Committee was a grave affair. It was amazing how seriously they took themselves.

Presently Chander appeared selling copies of *The Club Mosquito*, a journal produced specially for the occasion, which stung members in the weakest spots of

their personalities. There were caricatures and portraits of all the "Young Members" who were going to save the Club, as they put it, from the moss and cobwebs of old age. Really, these young men were very ruthless. They invented Election songs, and they sang boisterously :—

"We're going to vote all night,
We're going to vote all day."

Privileged sub-editors, dropping in for a half-hour from their offices, found themselves caught up on the tempest of exhilaration. "Hallo, here's Leman—have you voted yet, Leman?" and a paper would be fetched and Leman would be made to put a cross against thirteen names, with thirteen people urging him to have a drink. Bribery and corruption!

Humphrey abandoned himself to the merriment of the evening. He constituted himself Willoughby's election-agent, and canvassed for votes with shameless disregard for the Corrupt Practices Act. Sharp, the sporting journalist, was busy making a book on the result. That eminent war-correspondent, Bertram Wace, issued a manifesto, demanding to know why he should not be Chairman. The price of *The Club Mosquito* rose to a shilling a copy when it was known that all the proceeds were to go to the Newspaper Press Fund.

Humphrey found himself left alone with the excitement eddying all round him. He was able to survey the scene with an air of detached interest. It reminded him of his school-days: all these men were young of heart, with the generous impulses of boys; they had the spirit of eternal youth—the one reward which men of their temperament are able to wrest from life.

He saw Willoughby, with his black hair in a disordered tangle over his eyes, joining in the war-song of the Young Members.

As he looked at all these men, chattering, laughing, grouped together here and there where some one was telling an entertaining story, he saw the smiling aspect of Fleet Street, the siren, luring the adventurous stranger to her, with laughter and opulent promise. To-morrow they would all begin their nervous work again, struggling to secure a firm foothold in the niches of the Street, when a false move, a mistake, would bring disaster with it; but they thought nothing of to-morrow; they lived in a life of to-days . . .

He saw Tommy Pride come into the Club. Two years had left their mark on Tommy's face. New reporters had appeared in the Street, and somehow Tommy found himself marking time, while the army of younger men pressed forward and passed him. He could not complain; he felt that if he asserted himself, Rivers or Neckinger would tell him bluntly that they were cutting down the staff—the dreadful, unanswerable excuse for dismissal. He knew that his mind was less supple than it was years ago; the stress and the bitterness of competition was sterner now than in those days when they posted assignments overnight. So, too, his pen went more slowly, finding each day increasing the difficulty of grappling with new methods. Tommy Pride had lived in To-day, and now To-morrow was upon him.

"Stopping for the declaration of the poll, Pride?" asked Humphrey.

"Not me," said Tommy, picking a bundle of letters from his pigeon-hole. "I've had a late turn to-night, and the missis will be sitting up."

"Well, what about a drink?"

Tommy shrugged his shoulders wearily. "Oh—a whisky and soda," he said. "What a row these fellows are making." Willoughby attacked him with a voting paper, and Humphrey noticed how Pride's hand—the

hand that had written millions of words—trembled as he made crosses against the names. It was as if each finger were attached to thin wires; it reminded Humphrey of those toy tortoises from Japan, that danced and shook in a little glass case. And he thought: "Will my hand be like that one day?"

The torrent of talk flowed all round him; gusts of boisterous laughter marked the close of a funny story. In all the stories there was a note of egotism. He saw, suddenly, why these men were not as other men. They were profound egotists, they lived each day by the assertion of their own individuality. The stronger the individuality of the man, the greater his chance of success. And these men, he saw, though they all worked in a common school, were absolutely different from one another. They were different, even, in breeding: there were men whose voice and pose could only have been acquired at one of the 'Varsities; there were men who lacked the refinements of speech; keen, eager men, and men whose eyes had lost their lustre, who seemed weary with work; mere boys, self-assertive and confident with the wisdom of men of the world, and older men with grey heads and bald heads.

They surged about him, and came and went, in twos and threes, some of them departing to their homes in the suburbs, north and south, whither trains ran into the early hours of the morning.

Humphrey had been long enough in Fleet Street to know them all: if you could have taken the personalities of these men and blended them together, the composite result would have closely resembled the personality of Tommy Pride—who was now drinking his second glass of whisky. They were men of tremendously active brains—not one of them but had an idea for a new paper that was worth a fortune if only the capital could be procured—and all of them longed intensely for that

cottage in the country after the storm and stress of Fleet Street; they could not talk seriously without being cynical, for though they saw the real side of life, the pompous make-believe of the rest left them without any illusions.

"Better wait for the result now," Humphrey said to Tommy. "It'll be out in a few minutes."

"All right," said Tommy, glancing at the clock. "Green's offered me a lift in his cab. Have a drink, Quain. I had the hump when I came in—feel better now."

They all trooped upstairs, where the Young Members were making discordant noises. They sang new and improvised quatrains. You would have thought that not a care in the world could exist within those cheerful walls.

There was a shout of "Here they are." The vote-counters came into the room. One of them they hailed affectionately as "Grandpa." Humphrey had seen him before, walking about Fleet Street, with his silver beard and black slouch hat set on his white hair, but to-night he felt strangely moved, as the old man came into the room, smiling to the cheers. What was it? Some association of ideas passed through his mind, some linking up of Ferrol, young, powerful, master of so many destinies, with the picture before his eyes . . .

These thoughts were overwhelmed with a tumult of shouting. The old man was reading out the names of the members of the new Committee.

The Young Members had won.

"Come on," said Tommy Pride, "let's get off before the rush."

As they passed out of the Club into the cool air of the night, Tommy suddenly recollected Green and his offer of a cab. "Oh, never mind," he said; "can you lend me four bob for the cab; I'm rather short." Humphrey

passed the money to him, and, drawn by the jingle of the coin, as a moth is to candle, a man lurched out of the shadows of the court.

The gas-light fell on the unshaven face of the man, and made his eyes blink feebly: it showed the pitiful, shabby clothes that garbed the swaying figure.

"Hullo, Tommy," said the man. He smiled weakly, not sure of his ground.

"Good God!" said Tommy.

Eagerness now came into the man's face; a terrible eagerness, as if everything depended on his being able to compress his story into as few words as possible, before Tommy went. There was no beating about the bush.

"I say, old man, lend me a bob, will you? . . . Didn't you know? . . . Oh, I left two years ago. . . . Nothing doing. . . . Yes, I know I'm a fool. . . . Honest, this is for food. . . . Remember that time we had up in Chatsworth, when the Duke . . .? Seen anything more of that fellow we met in Portsmouth on the Royal visit? . . . What was his name? . . . Can't remember it . . . never mind, I say, old man, *can* you spare a bob?"

Tommy passed him one of the shillings he had just borrowed from Humphrey. "Why don't you pull up," he said; "you can do good stuff if you want to."

"Pull up!" said the man. "Course I can do good stuff. I can do the best stuff in Fleet Street. . . . Remember that story I wrote about . . .

There was something intensely tragic in this sudden kindling of the old, egotistical flame in the burnt-out ruin of a man. The cringing attitude left him when he spoke of his work.

"Well, you'd better get home . . ." Tommy said. "What's the missis doing?"

"She's trying to make a little by typewriting now. . . . Thanks for the bob. . . . He shambled down the

court towards Gough Square. "So long." His footsteps grew fainter, until the last echoes of them died away.

Tommy Pride came out with Humphrey into Fleet Street.

There came to them, as it comes only to those who work in the Street, the fascination of its night. The coloured omnibuses, and the cabs, and the busy crowds of people had left it long ago, and the lamps were like a yellow necklace strung into the darkness. Eastwards, doubly steep in its vacancy, Ludgate Hill rose under the silent railway bridge to St Paul's; westwards, the Griffin, the dark towers of the Law Courts, and the island churches loomed uncertainly against the starless sky. The lights shone in the high windows of offices about them, and they caught glimpses of men smoking pipes, working in their shirt-sleeves—Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, were waiting for their news. The carts darted up and down the street with loads of newspapers for the trains. There was a noise of moving machinery. A ragged, homeless man slouched wretchedly along the street, his eyes downcast, mumbling his misery to himself. Two men in grimy clothes were delving down into the bowels of the roadway, and dragging up gross loads of black slime. They worked silently, seeing nothing of the loathsomeness of their work. Over all, above even the noise of the machinery, there came the cleansing sound of swiftly running water, as the street-cleaners, with streaming hoses, swept the dust and the muck and the rubble of the day into the torrents of the gutter.

II

HUMPHREY took rooms in Clifford's Inn, because that was where Kenneth Carr lived. The two came together, though their natures were opposite, and their friendship had ripened.

Carr was an ascetic, denying himself most of the ordinary pleasures of life, sacrificing himself to the work of his heart; his mind was calm, with a spiritual beauty; he was a man of singularly high ideals. This contrast with Humphrey's frank materialism, his love of pleasure and lack of any deep, spiritual feeling, seemed only to draw their friendship closer. Then there was the memory of Wratten. They often talked together of him, and, as for Humphrey, he never found himself face to face with a difficult piece of reporting without imagining what Wratten would have done. Most people in Fleet Street had forgotten him long ago, but on Humphrey's mind he had left an indelible impression.

"I wonder what it was about Wratten that makes us remember him still," Humphrey said one day. "I had only known him a few months."

"I don't know," Kenneth said. "It's like that, I've noticed. Sometimes a man, out of all the others you meet, comes forward, and you feel instantly, 'This man is worth having as a friend.' The charm of Wratten was that there were two Wrattens: one, the glum, churlish man, with whom nobody could get on, and the other, the self-revealing Wratten we knew."

They smoked in silence. Presently Kenneth threw his cigarette into the fireplace.

"I suppose I'll have to get on with my book."

"Why don't you come out . . . come to the Club?"

"Not me, my son. I'm happier here. I want to get a chapter done."

"What's the good of writing novels . . . they don't pay, do they?"

"Pay! They pay you for every hour you spend over them," said Kenneth. "I should go brooding mad if I couldn't sit down for an hour or so every night and do what I like with my people. The unhappiest moments of my life were when, to oblige Elizabeth, I gave up novel-writing for a time, and took to poverty statistics."

Humphrey glanced up at the mantelpiece. A portrait of Elizabeth Carr was there, in a silver frame, set haphazard among the litter of masculine knick-knacks—ash-trays, a cigarette-box and a few old pipes. It was a portrait that had always attracted Humphrey; the sun had caught the depth of her eyes and the shadows about her throat. He was never in the room without being conscious of that portrait, and often, when he was not thinking of her at all, he would find himself looking upwards at the silver frame to see, confronting him, the eyes of Elizabeth Carr. She, herself, never seemed to be quite like the photograph. She came, sometimes, to see Kenneth, and, at rare intervals, Humphrey's visits coincided with hers.

She did not live with her brother. She was more fortunate than he, because she had been left an income which was large enough for all her wants. She had always wished to help Kenneth with a small allowance, but he declared he would not touch a penny of her money. "I'll fight my own battles," he said.

There was something in her attitude towards Humphrey—a vague, impalpable something—that left him always uneasy; perhaps it was a subtle display of deference—he could not define it, but he felt that she was

comparing him, in her mind, with Kenneth, and that he was worsted in the comparison. She would move about in the little room, preparing tea for them, her presence bringing an oddly domestic air into the rooms, and Humphrey would help her, and she would be jolly and laugh when he was clumsy, but all the time it was as if she were holding him away from her with invisible hands.

And, when he looked at her photograph, he saw behind the clear beauty of the face, with its smile of tenderness and large eyes that never left him, an Elizabeth Carr divinely meek . . . utterly unlike the Elizabeth Carr he knew, who carried herself with such graceful pride and seemed so far above him.

He took up the portrait for a moment. "She hasn't been here lately?" he said.

"Who?" asked Kenneth, at his writing-table.

"Your sister . . . you were speaking about the statistics you did for her."

"Oh? Elizabeth. No. She's been pretty busy with her work."

"Slumming, eh?"

"That's about it. I don't know half her schemes. Wonderful girl, Elizabeth. Now I come to think of it, I've got to go down to Epping Forest to-morrow. Some bean-feast she's giving to a thousand slum kids. There's sure to be a ticket in your office, why don't you ask to do it?"

"I will," said Humphrey. "A day's fresh air in the forest would do me good."

And he did. Things happened to be slack that day in Fleet Street, and Rivers thought there would be plenty of human interest in the story, "though, of course, it's a chestnut," so that was how Humphrey found himself on the platform at Loughton Station an hour later.

The morning was rich with the warmth and colour of June. The clear fresh smell of the country was all

about him. The scent of the flowers, the sight of the green fields dappled with the yellow and white of kingcup and daisy, the pale sky above him with the sun beating down from the cloudless blue, called him back to Easterham, and the life that now seemed centuries away. Throughout all the comings and goings of years, throughout the change, and the unrest of men and women, the old Cathedral close would be unaltered. The rooks would still clamour and circle about the beeches, and the ivy would grow more thickly. Looking back on Easterham, now on the odd market-place, and on the streets that wandered out to the hedgerows and meadow-lands towards the New Forest, he looked back on a picture of infinite peace.

A bird's song and the croon of bees as they swung in their flower-cradles; a horse galloping freely in a field, and cattle browsing in the sunshine—were not all these of more worth than anything else in life?

Unnoticed, he had relinquished everything to Fleet Street. The poison of its promise had drugged him. He could appreciate nothing outside its narrow area . . . news! news! and the talking of news; fifty steps round to the Pen Club, and fifty steps back to the office; all the day spent in that world of bricks and mortar, which had once seemed so vast, and was now to him nothing more than a very much magnified Easterham.

He had not even sought out London. He remembered regretfully the evening of his first ride with Beaver, through the crowded streets to Shepherd's Bush, when he had promised himself nights and days of enchantment in the new wonder of London. And the wonder was still unexplored. As it was with London, so it was with everything. His acquaintance and knowledge was superficial. There was no time for deep study, and the Past could not live with the Present hammering at its doors urgently day after day. Just so, too, with the

cities in every part of England. He had travelled much, but he came away from every place taking with him only the knowledge of the whereabouts of the hotel, the post-office and the railway station.

A sense of waste filled him ; he saw behind him the years, crowded with events, so crowded with movement that he could retain nothing of their activity. And he saw before him a repetition of this, year after year, and again year after year, a long avenue of waiting years, through which he passed, looking ever forward, seeing nothing, remembering nothing, and coming through them all empty-handed, unless . . .

Unless what? He saw the impasse waiting for him. What was there to be done to avoid it? He might rise to the highest point in reporting—climb up laboriously, only to find at the top of the ladder that others were climbing up after him to force him down the steps on the other side.

Kenneth Carr was rescuing the flotsam of the years. These books of his, though they brought little money, were something permanent ; they were the witnesses of endeavour ; they remained as things achieved out of the reckless squandering of the hours.

And Humphrey knew that for him there would be nothing left except the dead files of *The Day*, nothing more profitable than that, a brain worked out, weak eyes and a trembling hand. Yes, and as he looked about him on the glory of the country, and heard the breeze making a sea-noise among the trees, he felt that there was something everlasting here, if he could only grasp it. He could not explain it. He only knew that looking upwards into the lucent depths of the green leaves of a tree, and catching now and again the glimpse of the blue sky beyond, seemed to remove the oppression that weighed his soul, and release his mind from perplexity.

He smiled. The old phrase came echoing back to

him. "Two pounds a week and a cottage in the country," he thought. Eternal, pitiful, unfulfilled desire.

The whistle of the approaching train woke him from his thoughts. "I'm an ass," he said to himself. "I couldn't live a day without being in the thick of it."

He walked back to the station, just in time to see the train coming round the bend of the platform, giving a glimpse of fluttering handkerchiefs and eager faces at the windows. The stillness of the station was suddenly shattered into a thousand noisy pieces. The children tumbled over one another in their haste to be the first to see all that there was to see.

There was a mighty sound of shrill voices, chattering, laughing, and calling to one another: a confused picture of pallid-faced children, darting from group to group, seeking their child-friends, and arranging themselves in marching order. The teachers herded them together like hens marshalling their elusive brood. Humphrey surveyed the scene with an eye trained to the observation of detail.

He saw the painful cleanliness of the children, as though they had been scrubbed and washed for days before their outing. He saw behind the neatness of the pink ribbon and the mended boots, a vision of faded mothers, fumbling with hands shrivelled by laundry work, or fingers ragged with sewing, at these parting touches of pathetic finery. And, behind the vision of the mothers, he saw that whole sordid underworld hung round the neck of civilization. . . . These children, pinched and haggard, were left to live in the breathless slums, with only charity to help them. The State made laws for them: but there was no law to make them grow up otherwise than the generation of neglect which produced them.

They were too young to know the difference between

happiness and misery. They could only sing and march away, an army of rags and patched neatness, because for one whole day their young limbs were to have the freedom of the country. They thought of that one day, and not of the other three hundred and sixty-four days of squalor and want.

"Hullo—here you are, then," Kenneth Carr appeared out of the crowd of children. "Seen Elizabeth—I've lost her."

Humphrey looked along the platform, and he saw Elizabeth Carr bending down and talking to a little girl. She looked tall and beautiful, among all the harsh ugliness for which these children stood. Her figure, as she stooped to the little ones, seemed to shine with grace and merciful pity. She saw Humphrey, and nodded to him, as he raised his hat. Then she came up leading the child.

"Look," she said, and though her eyes were lit with anger, her voice was gentle. "Look at this child's dress —and the father's earning thirty shillings a week."

Humphrey looked. The child was dressed grotesquely, so grotesquely that it appealed more to the sense of the ludicrous than to the sense of pity. Her main garment was an absurd black cape sparkling with sequins, that undoubtedly belonged to her mother's cloak; it reached to below the child's knees. Beneath this was a tattered muslin blouse of an uncertain, faded colour, and beneath that—nothing. Elizabeth lifted the cape a little and showed undergarments made of string sacking. The child had neither shoes nor stockings.

"Isn't it a shame!" she cried, sending the child to join the rest. "Doesn't it revolt you?"

"Poverty!" said Humphrey. "What can one do?"

"Do!" retorted Elizabeth. "What's the good of having compulsory education, if you don't have compulsory clothing. I know the parents of that child.

They could dress that child if they wanted to. Oh," and she clenched her fists, "it makes me feel so helpless."

They talked about it on the way to the forest, as they followed in the wake of the children.

"The wicked folly and the shame of it," she said. "Does nobody realize the ruin and wreckage that belongs to big cities? Thousands on thousands of lives ended before they began. The parents don't know, and won't know.

"And what becomes of those who live? These children here will go through their school-days, and then—what? A small percentage of them may get on, the rest will become casual labourers, dock-hands, and loafers."

They passed a long, ill-clad youth lounging along the road. His face was brutally coarse, and he walked with a slouch.

"There's one of them," Elizabeth went on. "Now, I know that boy: he used to come to these outings three years ago. He's left school now, and he has tramped down from London for the sake of a meat-pie or a mug of tea. Lots of them do that, you know," she said to Humphrey. "He's never learnt a trade. Of course, he learnt history and geography, and all that, and he got a place, I think, as an errand-boy. There's no interest in running errands—so he just loafs now; and he'll loaf on through life, until he's an old man, sleeping on the Embankment, or on the benches on the Bayswater side of the Park. Perhaps he'll have a few spells in prison—anyhow, he's doomed. Lost. And so are nearly all these children here to-day."

The strength of her convictions amazed Humphrey. He had never heard Elizabeth talk like this before. He wondered why she, so beautiful and frail, should mingle with the ugliness of life. When they came to the

forest, and Kenneth wandered off alone, she told him.

"It's because behind all this sordidness there is something that is more than beauty—there are magnificent tragedies here, that make my throat dry. There are struggles to live of which nobody ever knows. And, sometimes, you know, when I come from one of my slums and stand by the theatres as they are emptying, and see the lighted motor-cars, and all these other women with jewels round their necks and in their ears, I want to laugh at the folly of it all.

"They don't know . . . they never can know, unless they go down to the depths, and look."

Humphrey was silent.

"And nobody can do anything, you know, except this sort of thing. It's a poor enough thing to do, but it's something to know you're helping."

"I think this work is noble," Humphrey said.

"Oh no—not noble. It would be noble if we could do something lasting—something permanent."

They were sitting now on the soft grass, and he looked sidewise at Elizabeth Carr, and saw the fine outline of her profile. There was great beauty in her face, in the delicate oval of her chin, in the shadows that played about her throat, showing soft and white above the low collar of lace. That low lace collar and unornamented dress gave to her a touch of demure simplicity. She had the fragrance of lavender: he could imagine her—(seeing her now, with her eyes and lips tender, and her hands meekly clasped in her lap)—standing in a room of chintz and Chippendale, tending her bowl of pink roses by the latticed window opened to the sunshine.

He sat by her absorbing her serenity; there was repose and rest in the unconscious pose of her body. He had suddenly found the Elizabeth Carr of the

photograph on Kenneth's mantelpiece: her presence seemed to bring him peace.

The noise of the children rioting in their happiness made her smile.

"Come," she said, "let us go and join them."

They walked across the open space in the forest, the soft grass yielding to their feet, and came upon the whole exulting landscape. On all sides of them the ragged little ones, released for a day from the barren prison-house of alley and by-way, ran and romped in the freedom of unfettered limbs, uttering shouts of triumph and gladness. This picture of merriment unchecked, cheered the heart with its bright movement. Here was life, overflowing, bubbling, swirling in little eddies among the trees and undergrowth, running free over the green meadow-lands with all the chattering animation of childhood.

Out of the main stream they found strange types of children, odd-minded little things, full of cunning and mother-wit that they had learnt already, knowing the world's hand was against them. Some of them clutched pennies in grimy fists: money saved in farthings for weeks in anticipation of this treat. Others secreted about their person portions of the meat-pie which was given them for lunch. They would take this home as an earnest of altruism.

Impossible to forget the shadow of misery that overhung all their lives; impossible to see these ragged children, who had hopeless years before them, without realizing the mad folly and the waste of citizenship.

Splendid Empire on which the sun never sets! Will the historian of the future, discovering in the ruins of the British Museum Humphrey's account of that day in Epping Forest, place his finger on the yellow paper with its faded ink, and cry: "This is where the story of the Decline and Fall of Britain begins."

They went to see the children take their tea. They sat at long plank tables under the corrugated iron roof of the shed-like pavilion. The girls were in one vast room, the boys in another. Their school-teachers rapped on the table, and the jabber and chatter faded away into a silence. Then the voice of one of the school-masters started singing—

"Praise God, from whom——"

and the hymn was taken up by the voices, singing vociferously—

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

There was nothing half-hearted about it; they made a great clamour of their thanks, and their shrill treble made echoes within echoes against the iron roof and wooden walls of the room in which they sat. And Humphrey, always the looker-on, saw the imperishable pathos of this and all that lay behind it, and for a moment he felt pity tug at his heart. Then, as if ashamed of his weakness, he turned to Elizabeth and saw that she was watching him. She laid a gloved hand on his sleeve for the fraction of a second; it was an impulsive, unconscious movement, the merest shadow of a caress.

"I did not know you could feel like that," she said softly.

III

In those days Humphrey, trained in the school of experience, took his place in the ranks of Fleet Street, that very narrow community, where each man knows the value of his brother's work.

He was being shaped in the mould. The characteristics of the journalist were more strongly marked in him than they had ever been. He was self-reliant and resourceful, he had acquired the magic faculty of making instant friendships; he had developed his personality, and there was about him a certain charm, a youthful ingenuousness of expression that stood him in good stead when he was at work. People liked Humphrey; among his colleagues in the Street, he was not great enough for jealousy, nor small enough to be ignored. He steered the middle course of popularity.

He had been long enough now on *The Day* for Ferrol to perceive his limitations. Humphrey did not know—nobody knew—that Ferrol from his red room was watching his work, noting each failure and each success, watching and weighing his value. And it was with something of regret that Ferrol realized that in Humphrey he had found not a genius, but merely a plodding conscientious worker, perhaps a little above the average. For, in spite of Rivers, who found that genius and reporting do not go hand in hand, Ferrol was always searching alertly for the miraculous writer whose style was individual; whose writing would be discussed in those broad circles where *The Day* was read.

One sees Ferrol hoping for that spark of genius to glow in Humphrey, dreaming, whenever his thoughts

took him back, of days now so dim that they seem never to have existed, and faced only with disappointment. Up to a certain point he could make Humphrey—but no further. Perhaps, after all, the boy might show his worth in work of broader scope. . . . Ferrol plans, and plans, rearranging the men in his employ, moving a man here, and a man there, a god with life for a chessboard and human lives as the men. . . . One sees Humphrey, young and vigorous, doing his daily work. . . .

It was an extraordinary life, full of uncertainties and sudden surprises . . . a life of never-ending energy, with little rest even in sleep, for into his dreams there crept all the tangle of the day's happenings. Disaster swept all round him, but he seemed to be lifted above all evil by the magic of his calling. The king can do no wrong: no journalist ever seemed to be hit by the hazards of life. Murders, the collapse of houses, railway smashes, roofs falling in and burying people in the rubble, shipwrecks and terrible fires. . . . Humphrey was always on the spot, sooner or later, with a dozen others of the craft. . . .

He was outside the range of the things that really mattered. Politics and the problems that touched deeply the lives of the people did not come his way. They fell into the hands of the lobby correspondent, the man in the Press Gallery of the House, or the sociological writers who stood somewhat aloof from the routine of the Street.

But, on the whole, the life was glorious, in spite of its bitter moments.

"I shall have to chuck it, you know," Kenneth Carr said, one day. "This life is too awful: it's the system that's wrong, there is no system."

That was Kenneth's point of view. Of course there was no system. Is there any system in life?

"We're all sick men, in Fleet Street," sighed Kenneth.

"We're sick and we're growing old. Our nerves are broken with the continual movement and unrest. There's no time allowance made for our stomachs: I tell you, we're all sick men in Fleet Street, brain, nerve and stomach."

At such times, Humphrey would laugh and defend the Street and its work, just to cheer Kenneth up.

"Don't you go and drop out," he urged. "I shall be left without a friend."

The next day they met each other on the platform at Paddington. There was to be a Royal week in Windsor. A foreign monarch had come to England.

"Well, what do you think of the life to-day?" Humphrey asked.

"Oh, it's all right," Kenneth laughed. "I suppose I wanted a little fresh air and sunshine. . . . I shall get it in the forest."

IV

HE was reading a letter in the bold, firm handwriting of Elizabeth Carr.

"DEAR MR QUAIN," she wrote, "I don't think I ever thanked you for the article you wrote of our day in the forest with the children. I asked Kenneth to tell you how glad I was, but I expect he forgot all about it. I think your article was most *sympathetic*, though I wish you hadn't made quite so much of that unfortunate child who was dressed so grotesquely. I will tell you what I mean when I see you, for I am writing to know if you can come to dinner here. I'm sorry Kenneth won't be able to come—he's away in Lancashire on that dreadful strike. Thank Heaven—he'll be leaving it all soon."

There was a postscript.

"Of course, I know the nature of your work will not let you say 'yes' definitely, but I've made the day Saturday, on purpose to give you a chance. And if I don't have a wire from you, I shall expect you."

It was quite a month since he had spent that day in Loughton with Elizabeth Carr, and though he could not name offhand the things he had done since then, day by day, that day and its incidents remained sharply defined in his memory.

Had he really taken more than usual care to write his account of their doings? Or, was it that the vision of her, and the recollection of her earnest eyes, inspired him to better work? Or, had there been nothing very

special about the story after all, and was her letter merely a courtesy?

The fact remained that he was flattered to receive the letter with its invitation. Kenneth had certainly forgotten to deliver her message. He looked upon it as something of a triumph for him: very patiently he had waited for a word from Elizabeth Carr.

There was that extraordinary remark of hers when he had watched the children sing their grace. He had asked her what she meant by it, and she had declined to say. He had felt humiliated by her words: did she imagine that he had no heart at all? She seemed to think that because he was a reporter on a halfpenny paper, he must be absolutely callous.

He re-read the letter. She was curiously captious. She seemed ready to take offence now because he had made a "story" out of that wretched child clad in its mother's cape and bedraggled blouse. Well, of course, she wasn't a journalist. She couldn't be expected to see human interest from the same point of view as *The Day*. He wrote, accepting her invitation provisionally.

In the days that followed, thoughts of Elizabeth Carr recurred with disturbing persistency. He recalled the odd way in which she had come into his life: first at that evening at the Wrattens, when Lilian Filmer had been his foremost thought, then, intermittently, at Kenneth Carr's, something unusually antagonistic in her attitude to him; and now she had come into the heart of his work, bringing with her a touch of intimacy. She, who had always averted herself from him, was now asking him to be her guest.

She, who had always seemed to ignore him, was, of a sudden, extending towards him tentacles of influence, vague and shadowy; he was uneasily aware of their presence.

He read her letter several times before the Saturday

came—the gentle perfume of it reminded him of her own fragrance. He was sensitive to praise and appreciation, and he dwelt often on those words which spoke of his work. It was pleasant to know that he had at last shown Elizabeth Carr what he could do. She was, he knew, judging him always by Kenneth's standard, in life as well as writing, and of course every one knew that Kenneth's ideals were high, that his writing was brilliant. . . . So Kenneth was going to leave Fleet Street. It was the first that Humphrey had heard of it. "I shall have to chuck it," Kenneth had said, and he was going to keep his word. He contemplated the prospect with melancholy. Kenneth was a good friend; his departure would leave an intolerable gap in London life. The chats and the evening meetings would be gone. . . . They would pass out of each other's daily life. . . .

Thus Saturday came, and Humphrey found himself free to carry out his acceptance of Elizabeth's invitation.

Humphrey had always imagined that Elizabeth lived in a flat with some woman-friend: he was surprised when he found the address led to a little white house, one of a row of such houses, in a broad, peaceful road at the back of Kensington High Street. It was one of those houses that must have been built when Kensington was a village; it was like a cottage in the heart of London. The Virginian creeper made its drapery of green over the trellis-work that framed the window, and the walls were green with ivy. An elderly woman opened the door to his knock, and he found himself in a low-ceilinged hall, with a few black-and-white drawings on the walls, and a reproduction of Whistler's Nocturne.

He was ushered into the sitting-room. Even if he had not known that it was her house, he could have chosen this room, out of all the rooms in London, as the room of Elizabeth Carr. Wherever he looked, he found a reflex of her peace and gentle calm.

In the few moments of waiting he took in all the details of the room: the soft-toned wall-paper, with a woodland frieze of blue and delicate shades of green, the old Japanese prints on the walls, and the little leather-bound books on the tables here and there. He had sat so many times in the rooms of different people whom he went to interview, that his observation had trained itself mechanically to notice such details. He heard a rustle on the stairs, the door opened gently, and Elizabeth Carr came into the room.

She looked as beautiful as a picture in the frame of her own room. So had he imagined her, her hair looped back from its centre parting piled in gleaming coils just above the nape of her neck, leaving its delicate outline unbroken; a long necklet of amethysts made a mauve rivulet against the whiteness of her bosom till it fell in a festoon over her bodice, and blended with the colour of her dress, amethystine itself. And in her hair there gleamed a comb beaten by a Norwegian goldsmith, and set with moonstone and chrysoprase.

She came forward to greet him, moving with the subtle grace of womanhood. Her charm, her frank beauty, filled him with a peculiar sense of unworthiness and embarrassment. Before the wonder of her, before the purity of her, everything else in life seemed incomprehensibly sordid.

"I am so glad you were able to come," she said. She looked him in the eyes as she spoke, and there was this, he noticed, about Elizabeth Carr: she meant every word she said—even the most trivial of greetings took on significance when she uttered them. Her words gave him confidence.

"It was good of you to ask me. . . ." There was a slight pause. "I nearly missed the house," he said with an inconsequential smile. "I always thought you lived in a flat."

"Did you?" she replied. "Oh no!—(Do sit down—I'm expecting some more visitors shortly.) I've had this house for a long time." She sighed. "It's an inheritance, you know, and I thought I'd live in it myself, instead of letting it. Kenneth and I have dreadful squabbles—he says it's too far out for him, and wants me to keep a flat with him in town—and I loathe flats. I've got a small garden at the back, and it's blessed in the summer. There's a walnut tree and a pear tree just wide enough apart to hold a hammock."

"A hammock in London!" cried Humphrey; "I envy you! Think of our Clifford's Inn."

"I really don't know how you people can live on the doorsteps of your offices. I'm sure it's not good for you. Anyway, Kenneth's giving it up."

"I hadn't heard of it before your letter."

"It was only settled a few days ago. Grahams, the publishers, liked his last book well enough to offer him a good advance; and the book's sold in America—he's got enough to get a year's start in the country, and so he's going down there to write only the things he wants to."

Humphrey smiled in his cocksure way. "Aha! he'll soon get sick of it, Miss Carr."

Elizabeth Carr's fingers strayed into the loops of her amethyst necklace; the light shone on the violet and blue gems as she gathered them into a little heap, and let them fall again. Her brows hinted at a frown for a moment, and then they became level again.

"Nothing would make you give up Fleet Street, I suppose?" she asked.

"No . . . the fever's in me," he said. "I couldn't live without it."

"Are you so wrapped up in it?"

"Well," said Humphrey, "I suppose I am. It's rather fine, you know, the way things are done. You

ought to go through a newspaper office and see it at work . . . all sorts of people, each of them working daily with only one aim—to-morrow's paper. . . ."

"And you never think of the day when Ferrol doesn't want you any more?"

"Well, you know," Humphrey said, with a smile, "it's difficult to explain. We just trust to luck. After all, lots of men have drifted into journalism; when they're done, they drift back again."

"I see," Elizabeth Carr said, nodding her head gently. "And there are always fresh men to drift."

"I suppose so."

"And, you're quite content."

Humphrey shrugged his shoulders. "What else can I do?"

The bell rang. "Ah! what else!" she exclaimed, rising to meet her visitors.

The new-comers were introduced to Humphrey. One was a tall, thin man, with remarkable eyes, black and deep-sunken, and the thin mobile lips of an artist. His name was Dyotkin; he spoke English fluently, with a faint Russian accent. The other was a woman whose youthful complexion and features of middle age were in conflict, but whose hair tinged with grey left no doubt of her years. Although her dress was in excellent taste, it suggested an unduly overbearing wealth. Humphrey recognized her name when he heard it: Mrs Hayman. She was one of the philanthropists who helped Elizabeth in her work.

They went into dinner, to sit at a little oval Chippendale table just big enough for the four of them; Dyotkin and he faced one another, sitting between Elizabeth and Mrs Hayman.

"Your work must be very interesting," Mrs Hayman said.

Humphrey smiled. That was the commonest

remark he heard. Those who did not know what the work was, perceived dimly its interest, but not one of them could ever be made to understand the intense, eager passion of the life.

"It is interesting," Humphrey said. "Miss Carr knows a good deal of it."

"I suppose you go everywhere—it must be splendid."

"When you talk like that, I, too, think it must be splendid. Sometimes, it's very funny."

"Still, it's nice to see everything, isn't it? And I suppose you go to theatres and concerts."

"Oh no! I'm not a critic. That's another man's work. I'm just a reporter."

"I don't know how you get your news. What do you do? Go out in the morning and ask people? And isn't it dreadfully difficult to fill the paper?"

It was always the same; nobody could understand the routine of the business. Everybody had the same idea that newspaper offices lived in a day of tremulous anticipation lest there should not be enough news. Nobody understood that the happenings in the world were so vast and complex, that their sole anxiety was to compress into four pages the manifold events that had happened while the earth had turned on its axis for one day.

"Now, yesterday, for instance?" Mrs Hayman said, with an inviting smile. "What did you do yesterday?"

"Oh, yesterday was an unpleasant day. I had to go to Camberwell late at night. A man had given himself up somewhere in Wales. He said he'd murdered Miss Cott—you remember the train murder, three years ago. . . . He kept a chemist's shop in Camberwell, we found out. So I had to go there. I got there dreadfully late. The door was opened by a girl. Her eyes were swollen and red. She was his daughter, I guessed. . . . I can tell you, I felt awkward."

"I should think so," Elizabeth said. He looked at her, and saw that she was annoyed.

"What did you do—go away?" Mrs Hayman asked.

"Go away? Good gracious, no. I interviewed her."

"Interviewed her!"

"Well, I talked with her, if you like. They were very pleased at the office."

"I think it's repulsive," Elizabeth remarked.

"Oh, come!" Humphrey remonstrated.

The dinner was finished. It occurred to Humphrey that he had fallen from grace.

"We will go into the next room," Elizabeth said, "and Mr Dyotkin shall play to us." As she passed by him, Humphrey went forward and opened the door for her. Dyotkin and Mrs Hayman lingered behind. He passed into the adjoining room with Elizabeth. He wanted to defend himself.

"You're a little hard on me, you know," he said.

"I don't understand how you can do it," she said.

"Do what?"

"Forget all your finer feelings, and make a trade of it."

"I don't make a trade of it," he said, hotly. "You cannot separate the good from the bad. You must take us just as we are—or leave us."

The words came from him quietly, almost unconsciously, as though in an unguarded moment his tongue had taken advantage of his thoughts. She turned her face sideways to his, and he was conscious of a queer look in her eyes—an expression which was absolutely foreign to them. He saw doubt, uncertainty and surprise in the swift glance of a moment. "I ought not to have said that," he thought to himself. And, then, hard upon that, defiantly, "I don't care what she thinks; it's what I thought."

The expression in her eyes softened. Though he

had said nothing more, it was as if he had subtly communicated to her that which was passing in his mind.

"Yes," she said, with softness in her voice, "we must take the good with the bad, but we must separate the sincere from the insincere. I saw you that day in the forest when your eyes showed how you felt the pity of it all—and yet, you see, you did not put that in *The Day*. You did not write as you felt."

So that was her explanation. How could he make her comprehend the conflict that was for ever in his mind, and even his explanation could not redeem him in her eyes.

John Davidson's verse ran through his mind like a dirge:—

> "Ambition and passion and power,
> Came out of the North and the West,
> Every year, every day, every hour,
> Into Fleet Street to fashion their best.
> They would write what is noble and wise,
> They must live by a traffic in lies!"

Ah, but it was wrong of her to take that view. As if one could ever tell the truth in a world where the very fabric of society is woven from lies and false conceptions. How could he tell her and make her believe that he was thrilled, and that his throat tightened at things that he saw—and yet he never dared give way to his emotions, and write them. Why, the most vital things in his life were not the things he wrote, but the things he did not write.

Though his mind was rioting with indignation, he laughed. "We mustn't take our work too seriously," he said. "It's too ephemeral for that. Things only last a day."

She did not answer. She turned from him without a word. He had meant to anger her, and he had succeeded. There was a chatter of voices in the

passage and Mrs Hayman came into the room with Dyotkin. Elizabeth went towards him.

"Won't you play something?" she begged.

Dyotkin sat down by the piano. The seat was too low; he wanted a cushion, or some books, and Elizabeth went to fetch them.

The sight of her waiting on Dyotkin filled Humphrey with an increasing annoyance. It jarred on him somehow. He attempted to help in an ungainly way, but Elizabeth, without conveying it directly, held aloof from his assistance. He settled himself in the arm-chair by Mrs Hayman . . . and Dyotkin played.

Humphrey had no knowledge of music. He did not even know the name of the piece that was being played, but as the fingers of Dyotkin struck three grand chords, something stirred within his soul, and, gradually, a vague understanding came to him, and he followed and traced the theme through its embroidery. And the following of the theme was just like the following of an ideal. At times he was lost in waves of seductive sounds, that charmed him and led his thoughts away, and then, suddenly, the chords would emerge again, out of the bewildering maze of melody clear and triumphant, again, and yet again; he could follow them, though they were cunningly concealed beneath intricate patterns.

And then, for a moment, he would lose them, but he knew that they were still there, if he sought for them, and so he stumbled on; and, behold, once more as the dawn bursts out of the darkness, the familiar sounds struck on his ears. And now they were with him always: he hearkened to them, and they were fraught with a strange, delicious meaning. "I have thought this," he said, in his mind.

Here was something far, far removed from anything of daily life. He was uplifted, exalted from earthly things. The wonder of the music enchanted him.

Ah! what achievements were not possible in such moments! He felt grandiose, noble and apart from life altogether. . . . The music ceased. He sighed as one awaking from the glory of a dream. He looked up, and his eyes, once again, met the eyes of Elizabeth, deep and tender and unspeakably divine.

V

IT is impossible to point a finger at any date in this period of the career of Humphrey Quain and say, "This is the day on which he fell in love with Elizabeth Carr." For the days merged gradually into weeks and months, and they met at irregular intervals, and out of their meetings something new and definite came to Humphrey.

There was no sudden transition from acquaintance to friendship, from friendship to love. He could not mark the stages of the development of their knowledge of one another. But before he was aware of its true meaning, once again the spirit of yearning and unrest took hold of him.

This time, his love was different from that abrupt love-affair with Lilian Filmer. Then untutored youth had broken its bounds, and love had swept him from his foothold. He had been ardent, passionate in those days, the fervour of love had intoxicated him; but now, with this slow attachment, his love was a different quality. Lilian, coming fresh upon the horizon of his hopes, bringing with her the promise of all that he needed in those days, had made a physical appeal to him. Always there was working, subconsciously, in his mind, the thought of her desirability. She offered him material rewards; they were attracted to each other by the mutual disadvantages of their surroundings.

Their meeting, their abortive love-affair was the expression of the everlasting desire of the companionship of sex: they were, both of them, groping after things half-understood, towards a goal that looked glamorous in the incomplete vision they had of it.

But Elizabeth Carr appealed to the intellectual in him. No doubt the old primeval forces compelled him towards her, but they were far below the surface of his thoughts whenever the vision of Elizabeth rose before him. He could not describe the hold she had on his imagination. Her influence had been so subtly and gently exercised, that he had not noticed the power of it, until now he was dominated by the thought of her. The finer spirit that lies dormant in every man, except in the very basest, put forth its wings and awoke. In little questions of everyday honour he began to see things from Elizabeth's point of view: little, trivial questions of his dealings with mankind which jarred on Elizabeth's own code of morality. Unquestionably, he was better for her influence, better from the spiritual standpoint, but weaker altogether when judged by the standard of everyday life. Elizabeth preached the gospel of altruism not directly, but insidiously, and he found himself adopting her views.

Hitherto his had been the grim doctrine of worldly success: those who would be strong must be ruthless and remorseless; there must be no halting consideration of the feelings of others. Though he did not realize it, his absorption of Elizabeth's ideals was weakening him, inevitably.

The charity of her work, with its gentle benevolence, was reflected in all her life. She gained happiness by self-sacrifice, and peace by warring against social evils. Their characters and temperaments conflicted whenever they met, and yet, after each meeting, it seemed to Humphrey that their friendship was arising on a firmer basis. Sometimes the shock of their opposing personalities would leave behind it quarrelsome echoes —not the echoes of an open quarrel, but the unmistakable suggestion of disagreement and dissatisfaction. He blundered about, trying to fathom her wishes, but

her individuality remained always to him a problem, inscrutably complex.

There were times, it seemed, when their spirits were in perfect agreement, when he was raised high in the wonder of the esteem in which she, obviously, held him. Those were the times when he came first to realize that he loved her: and the audacity of his discovery filled him with dismay. He knew that she was altogether superior; she lived exalted in thought and deed in a plane far above him. They met, it is true, over tea, or at a theatre, just as if they both inhabited the same sphere, but, in spite of that, they were as separate planets, whirling in their own orbits, rushing together for an instant, meeting for a fraction of time, and soaring away once more until again they drew together.

And, even when understanding of her seemed nearest to him, she suddenly receded from his grasp. A change of voice, a change of expression, a movement of her body—what was it? He did not know. He only knew that something he had said had separated them: she could become, in a moment, distant and unattainable, another woman altogether, coldly antagonistic.

Yet, by the old symptoms, he knew that he loved her. She persisted in his thoughts with an alarming result. He found himself pausing, pen in hand, at his desk in the reporters' room, thinking, "Would Elizabeth be pleased with this? . . ." And an impulse that needed all his strength to combat seized him to abandon the set form into which *The Day* had cast his thoughts, to criticize and to express his own individual impression, whether they accorded or not with the views held by *The Day*. This was altogether new and disturbing. He was a mouthpiece whose mere duty was to record the words of others by interviews, or a painter to present pictures and not opinions. Conscience and convictions were luxuries that belonged to the critics of art, and the leader-writers.

There came to him days of unqualified unhappiness, when he was possessed by doubts. For the first time he mistrusted the value of his work: he began to see that the fundamental truths of life were outside his scope. Cities might be festering with immorality and slums; vice might parade openly, but these things could never be touched on in a daily newspaper. Nobody was to blame, least of all those who controlled the newspaper, for it is not the business of a daily to deal with the morals of existence. . . . It is not easy to analyse his feelings . . . but, as a result of all this vague tormenting and apprehension, the old thrill at the power and wonder of the office which throbbed with daily activities forsook him, leaving in its place nothing but the desolating knowledge of the littleness and futility of it all.

The phase passed: the variety of the work enthralled him again. He travelled to distant towns and remote villages, and whenever he was in the grip of his work, all thoughts of Elizabeth Carr departed from him. He obtained extraordinary glimpses into the lives of other people; he acquired a knowledge into the working of things that was denied to those who only gleaned their knowledge second-hand from the things that he and others wrote. He saw things all day long: the plottings, the achievements and the failures of mankind.

The other men of the Street flitted into his life and out again at the decree of circumstance. For a week, perhaps, half-a-dozen of them would be thrown together in some part of England. They met at the hotels; they formed friendships, and they parted again, knowing, with the fatalism of their craft, that they would forgather perhaps next week, perhaps next year. There was no sentiment in these friendships.

There were the photographers, too. A new race of men had come into Fleet Street, claiming kinship with

the reporters, yet divided by difference of thought and outlook upon news. They were remarkable in their way, the product of the picture daily paper. And their coming marked the doom of the artist illustrators in the newspapers. They were the newest of the new generation, shattering every conception even of the younger men of the manner in which a journalist should perform his duty. The photographers were drawn, as a class, from the studios and operating-rooms of the professional photographer. They forsook the posing of babies and young men in frock coats for the photographic quest of news.

Their finger-tips and nails were brown with the stain of iodoform, and for them there was no concealment of their profession, for they went through life with the burden of their cameras slung over their shoulders. Their audacity was astounding, even to Humphrey and his friends,who knew the necessity of audacity themselves.

They ranged themselves outside the Law Courts, or the Houses of Parliament, or wherever one of the many interests of the day centred, and when a litigant or a Cabinet Minister appeared, a dozen men closed towards him, their cameras at the level of their eyes, and a dozen intermittent "clicking" noises marked the achievement of their quest. They saw life in pictures; a speech was nothing to them but the open mouth and the raised arm of the speaker; the poignancy of death left them unmoved before the need of focus and exposure.

The difficulties of their work seemed so immense to Humphrey that reporting seemed child's play beside it. For not only had they actually to be on the spot, to overcome prejudices and barriers, but, once there, they had to select and group their picture, and to reckon with the light and time. And though the photographers and the reporters were far removed from one another by the external nature of their work, though neither class saw life from the identical standpoint, yet they were inter-

dependent, and linked by the same ceaseless forces working towards one common end. . . .

Sometimes, also, in out-of-the-way places, Humphrey met men who reminded him of his days on the *Easterham Gazette*, men with attenuated minds who were even more absorbed in their work than the London reporter. They had a shameless way of never concealing their identity: they were always the "reporter"; some of them never saw the dignity of their calling, they were careless of speech and appearance, seeming to place themselves on the level of inferior people, and submitting to the undisguised contempt of the little local authorities, who spoke to them scornfully as "You reporters."

Yet, among these, Humphrey found scholars and men of strange experience. Their salaries were absurdly low for the work they did—thirty shillings to two pounds a week was the average; their lives were a thousand times more dismal and humdrum than the lives of the London men. And, in spite of these, many London men sighed for the pleasant country work. Whenever Humphrey heard a man speak of the leisure and peace of country journalism, he told them of Easterham and its dreadful monotony.

He had interior glimpses, too, of other newspaper offices; not a town in the kingdom without its sheet of printed paper, and its reporter recording the day or the week. These offices held his imagination by their sameness. Whether it was Belfast or Birmingham, Edinburgh or Exeter, their plan was uniform. There was always the narrow room, with its paper-strewn desks or tables at which the reporters sat; always the same air of hazy smoke hovered level with the electric-light bulbs; the same type of alert-eyed men, with the taut lips and frown of those who think swiftly, came into the room, smoking a cigarette or a pipe (but rarely a cigar), and brought with them a familiar suggestion of careless

good-fellowship as they sat down to the work of transcribing their notes. And, always, wherever he went, the pungent smell of printer's ink was in his nostrils, the metallic rustle of shifting types from the linotype room, and the deep, rumbling sound of machinery in his ears.

Ah, when he got down to the machines that moved it all, he probed to the depths of the simple greatness. Those big, strong men who worked below it all, and lived by the labour of it, made a parable of the whole social system. Of what avail would all their writing be, if it were not for the men and the machines below?

Once he went down the stone steps to the high-roofed basement of *The Day*. He went at midnight, just when the printing was about to begin. It was as if he had penetrated into the utmost secrecy of the office Here were the things of which nobody seemed to think; here, again, were men in their aprons stained with grease and oily ink; men with bare, strong arms lifting the curved plates of metal, and fixing them to the cylinders; each man doing his allotted work, oiling a bearing here, tightening a nut there, moving busily about the mighty growth of machinery that filled the brightly lit room. The sight of that tangle of iron and steel confused his thoughts. He understood nothing of it all. Those great machines rose before him, towering massively to the roof, tier upon tier of black and glittering metal, with rods and cranks, and weird gaps here and there showing their bowels of polished steel. The enormous rolls of paper which he had seen carried on carts and hoisted many a time into the paper-department of the office, were waiting by each machine, threaded on to a rod of steel. Their blank whiteness reflected the light of the electric lamps.

And then, suddenly, a red light glowed, and somebody shouted, and a man turned a small wheel in the wall—

just as a motor-car driver turns the wheel of the steering gear—and the great machines broke into thunderous noises. The din was appalling. It was loud and continuous, and the clamour of it deadened the ears.

Humphrey looked and saw the white reels of paper spinning, and, through the forest of iron and steel, he could trace a cascade of running whiteness, as the paper was spun between the rollers, up and down and across, until it met the curved plates of type, and ran beneath them, to reappear black with the printed words. And the columns looked like blurred, thin lines in the incredible rapidity of the passing paper. The moments were magical; he tried to follow the course of this everlasting ribbon of paper, but he could not. He saw it disappear and come into his vision again. He saw it speed and vanish along a triangular slab of steel, downwards into the invisible intricacies that took it and folded it into two and four and eight pages, cut it and patted it into shape, and tossed it out, quire after quire, a living, printed thing—*The Day*.

And everywhere, wherever he glanced at the turbulent, roaring machines, little screws were working, silent wheels were spinning, small, thin rods were moving almost imperceptibly to and fro, to and fro. He saw great rollers touching the gutters of ink, transmitting their inky touch to other rollers, spinning round and round and round; and the paper, speeding through it all, from the great white web to the folded sheets that were snatched up by waiting men and bundled into a lift, upwards into the night where the carts were waiting.

And the force of the noise was dreadful, and the power of the machines perpetual and relentless as they flung from them, with such terrible ease, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of square, folded papers.

They looked as if they could crush the lives of men in the swift snare of their machinery.

VI

WHOM should he meet one day, but Beaver!

Beaver of the inky thumbs and the bitten nails, who had, somehow, eluded him, though they both worked in the narrow Street. Nothing astonishing in this, for the work of Beaver lay in circles different from his own. He never came outside the radius of meetings, inquests, the opening of bazaars and the hundred and one minor happenings that are to be found in "To-day's Diary." But here he was, utterly unchanged from the Beaver with whom Humphrey had lived in Guilford Street, with Mrs Wayzgoose, her wasteful coal-scuttles and her bulrushes.

They met in a chop-house by Temple Bar, a strange place, where the lower floor was packed with keen-faced men from the Courts of Justice over the way and the Temple at the back. They sat crowded together, abandoning all comfort in the haste to enjoy the luxury of the chops and steaks for which the house was famed.

There were no table-cloths on the round tables, where coffee-cups and plates of poached eggs and rounds of toast jostled each other. Only in England would people sit with joy and eat cheek by jowl in this fashion, with the smell of coffee and hot food in their nostrils, and the clatter of plates and knives and forks in their ears.

Upstairs men played chess and dominoes over coffee and rolls, cracking their boiled eggs with difficulty in the cramped space.

Humphrey heard a voice hail him as he threaded his way between the tables. He looked back and saw Beaver waving a friendly fork at him.

"Hullo!" cried Beaver, shifting his chair away a few

inches, and seriously incommoding a grey-haired man so absorbed in his game of chess that his coffee was cold and untouched. "Come and sit here," cried Beaver.

They shook hands. "Well, how goes it?" Humphrey asked. "Still with the nose to the grindstone?"

"That's it," Beaver said. Their positions had been changed since the days of Easterham, when Beaver seemed miles above him in worldly success. He remembered the day Beaver left for London, to embark on a career which shone clear and brilliant in Humphrey's imagination. "Write in!" Those had been Beaver's last words. "Write in. That's what I did." The vision of it all rose before him now, as he sat by Beaver: the dingy office, with the scent of the fishmonger next door, the auctioneer's bills on the walls, with samples of mourning and wedding cards, and tradesmen's invoice headings, to show the excellence of the *Gazette's* jobbing department. And now—? He was conscious of a change in Beaver's attitude towards him.

Humphrey had taken his place in Fleet Street among the personalities, among the young men of promise and achievement. He had even seen his name signed to occasional articles in *The Day*—glorious thrill, splendid emotion, that repaid all the long anonymous hours of patient work!

"You're getting on!" Beaver said. There was admiration unconcealed in his eyes and voice. "Great Scott! It seems impossible that you and I ever worked together on that rotten Easterham paper. That was a fine story you did of the Hextable Railway Smash."

"I've got nothing to complain of," Humphrey replied, hacking at a roll of bread. "It hasn't been easy work. Yours isn't, for the matter of that."

Beaver laughed. "Oh, mine—it isn't difficult, you know. I get so used to it, that I can report a speech mechanically without even thinking of the speaker."

"It's a safe job, you know," he said, after a pause. "A life job."

Humphrey knew what Beaver's exultation in the safety of his job meant.

There were men in Fleet Street, husbands of wives, and fathers of families, who lived and worked tremblingly from day to day, never certain when a fatal envelope would not contain the irrevocable "regret" of the editor that he could no longer continue the engagement.

Why, it might happen to Humphrey himself, for aught he knew. Truly, Beaver was to be envied after all.

"But don't you think you'd do better on a daily paper?" Humphrey said. "I could tell Rivers about you, you know. There might be room on *The Day*."

"I'm taking no risks. I'm going to stop where I am. You see—er—" Beaver became suddenly hesitant, and smiled foolishly. "What I mean to say is—I'm engaged to be married."

He leant back in his seat and contemplated the astonishment in Humphrey's face.

"No—are you really!"

"Fact," retorted Beaver. "Been engaged for the last year."

Beaver going to be married! The news touched Humphrey oddly: Beaver could be earning very little more than Humphrey had earned at the time when he had almost plunged into married life, and there was no desire on Beaver's part to reach out and grasp greater things; he was in a life job, untouched by the wrack and torment of ambition, and the craving for success. Oh, assuredly, Beaver was not to be pitied in the equable calmness of his life and temperament.

"Well, I congratulate you, old man—though I never thought you were the marrying sort."

Beaver took the congratulations blushingly. "Nor did I, until I met Her."

He spoke of "Her" in an awed, impressive manner, as though She were some abnormal person far removed from all other people in the world. Humphrey tried to figure the girl whom Beaver had chosen. He thought of her as a rather plain, nice homely sort of person, with no great burden of intellect or imagination.

Beaver's hand dived into an inside pocket, and out came a leather case. This he opened, and displayed a photograph, reverently.

"That's her!" he said, showing the portrait.

Humphrey kept his self-possession well. Neither by a look nor a word did he betray the past: there was nothing in his manner to show Beaver that the girl whose portrait he held in his hand was she whose lips had clung to his in the young, passionate kisses of yester-year.

But, as Humphrey looked on the face of Lilian Filmer, the same Lilian, even though the photograph was new, and the hair was done in a different fashion, an acute feeling of sorrow came over him, bringing with it the remembrance of aching days, of the early beginnings, of those meetings and partings, and hearts that strained, and he saw the reflection of himself, foolish and cruel, mistaking the shadow for the substance, struggling and struggling, all for nothing . . . for not even as much as Beaver had gained.

She looked at him out of the eyes of her photograph, and about her lips there still hovered that smile which had always been a riddle to him; a smile of indulgent love, or contempt? Who knows—a woman's smile is the secret of her sex. Yet now, it seemed, her lips were curved in triumph. This was her revenge on him, that he should go for ever loveless through the world, while she should steal into a haven of welcome peace.

Beaver's voice brought him back to physical things. She would kiss Beaver's shaggy-moustached lips, and his

arms would catch her in an embrace. . . . How soon she had forgotten . . . he thought, unreasonably. . . . She might have waited. . . . She might have understood. . . .

"Well?" said Beaver, awaiting praise. "You've had a good old look."

"She's awfully nice and charming," Humphrey answered, returning the photograph. "She's like somebody I know."

"Oh, you've probably seen the original, old man, when you used to come and call for me. She used to be one of the girls in our office."

He had forgotten that lunch in the Fleet Street public-house, when Humphrey had asked for the name of the girl.

Used to be one of the girls in the office! Then Lilian had left. He wondered what she was doing, and an impulse that could not be withstood, compelled him to find out whether she had ever mentioned him to Beaver.

"By George!" he said. "I remember, now. Miss Filmer, her name was, wasn't it?"

"That's it, Miss Filmer. Did you ever speak to her, then?"

He was treading on uncertain ground. It was clear that she had never spoken of him. He felt that she had forgotten him, absolutely and completely.

"Oh, I think so—just casually, now and again."

"Well, I never!" said the innocent Beaver. "That's interesting. I'll tell her I met you."

"Oh, she wouldn't remember me or my name," Humphrey answered, hastily. "It was only just 'How-d'ye-do' and 'Good-day' with us. . . . So she's left the office now."

"Yes. It's rather a sad story. Her father died, you know. He was a chronic invalid—paralysis, I think.

Anyhow, we don't speak of it much, and I've never pressed her. But the father who was so useless in life, has been the salvation of the mother by his death. Odd, isn't it? He was insured for a good round sum, and Lilian's mother—did I tell you her name was Lilian?—has bought a little annuity, so that Lilian's free. She used to slave for her mother and the rest of the family until they grew up. That's why she worked overtime at the office. 'Pon me soul, I'd rather be the lowest jackal in Fleet Street than some of these poor little typist girls at eighteen bob a week. . . . Well, time's up. I've got to be at the Mansion House at three: the Lord Mayor's taking the chair at some blooming meeting to raise a fund for something, somewhere. What are you doing to-day?"

"Oh, I'm on the Klipp case at the Old Bailey."

Humphrey came away profoundly disturbed. Something entirely unexpected had happened. Lilian had lived as the vaguest shadow at the back of his mind, just as he had last seen her, when she bent down to kiss him, and now this picture would have to be erased. He shuddered at the thought. She was Beaver's "girl": she would be Beaver's "missis."

After all, what did it matter? He and Lilian had long since parted; there had been little in common between them. He might have married her, and been as Beaver; she might have married him, but never, never, could she have held the magic and the inspiration of Elizabeth Carr.

His mind, always susceptible to outside influences, brooded on the new fact that had come into his life. Unconsciously, as a natural sequel to his thoughts, he began to dream of his new love, and to see himself happier than he had ever been, with Elizabeth for ever at his side. The same motives that impelled him to Lilian after that scene in the registry office, when

Wratten was married, now urged him towards Kenneth Carr's sister. . . .

And, of course, one day, Beaver would have to mention his name to Lilian. She would probably smile and say nothing. "He's engaged now," Beaver would say. "There won't be any bachelors left, soon." And that would be his message to Lilian.

VII

On a Saturday evening some weeks later, Humphrey sat in the dismantled room in Clifford's Inn, in which he and Kenneth Carr had shared so many hours of grateful friendship.

The room looked forlorn enough. Square gaping patches on the wall marked the places where pictures had once hung; the windows were bared of curtains and the floor was dismal without the carpet, littered with scraps of paper and little pieces of destroyed letters. Trunks and boxes ready for the leaving were in the small entrance hall, now robbed of its curtains and its comfort. A pair of old boots, a broken pipe, a row of empty bottles and siphons, a chipped cup or two—these alone formed the salvage which the room would rescue from Kenneth's presence.

"This," said Kenneth, taking the pipe-rack from the mantelpiece, "this, my son, I give and bequeath to you." He laughed, and tossed it over to Humphrey, who caught it neatly.

Kenneth waved his arm comprehensively round the room. "Now if there's any other little thing you fancy," he said, "take your choice. I'm afraid there's nothing but old boots and broken glass left. You might fancy a bottle or two for candlesticks."

"The only thing of yours I coveted was your green edition of Thackeray, and you took jolly good care to pack that before I came," Humphrey remarked.

"I'll send you one for your next birthday. I shall be rolling in money when I get to work. Meanwhile, just hold this lid up, while I put these photographs in."

The light glinted on the silver of the frames.

Humphrey knew nothing of two of them, but the third was a photograph that he had always observed. He could see it now as it lay, face upwards, in Kenneth's hand—the photograph of Elizabeth, very sweet and beautiful, with soft eyes that seemed to be full of infinite regret.

"Do you know, old man," he said, "I wish you'd let me have that photograph."

"Which one?"

"The one of Elizabeth." Closer acquaintance had led to the dropping of the formal "Miss" and "Mister."

"What will Elizabeth say: it was a special and exclusive birthday present to me, frame and all."

"You can easily get another one. Keep the frame if you want to. Honest, I'd like to have the photograph. It would remind me of you and all the jolly talks we've had."

"Best Beloved," laughed Kenneth, jovially, "I can refuse you nothing. It is yours, with half my kingdom." He slipped the photograph from the frame. "You know, I feel exhilarated at the thought of leaving it all. I walk on air. I am free." He slammed the lid on the last box and pirouetted across the room.

"Thanks," said Humphrey, placing the photograph in his letter-case.

"Think of it," Kenneth cried, "from to-morrow I'm a free man—free to write as I will: free to say at such and such a time, 'Now I shall have luncheon,' 'Now I shall have dinner,' or, 'Now I will go to bed.' Free to say, 'To-morrow week at three-thirty I shall do such and such a thing,' in the sure and certain knowledge that I shall be able to do it. Henceforth, I am the captain of my soul."

"Oh yes, you feel pretty chirpy now, but just you wait. You wait till there's a big story on, and you read all the other fellows' stories—you'll start guessing who

did this one, or who got that scoop—and you'll wish you were back again."

"Not I! I shall sit in the seclusion of my arm-chair, and gloat over it all the next morning. And I shall think, 'Poor devils, they're still at it—and all that they think so splendid to-day will be forgotten by to-morrow. I've had my fill of Fleet Street. . . . Besides, I don't quite break with it."

"Why?"

"Didn't I tell you? Old Macalister of *The Herald* is a brick. He's the literary editor, you know, a regular spider in a web of books. He's put me on the reviewers' list, so you'll see my work in the literary page of *The Herald.* And it's another guinea or so."

"Good old Macalister," Humphrey said. "The literary editors are the only people who give us a little sympathy sometimes. I believe that whenever they see a reporter they say: 'There, but for the grace of God, go I."

Kenneth surveyed the room. "There," he said, brushing the dust of packing from him. "It's finished. In an hour I shall be gone."

"What train are you catching?"

"The eight-twenty. I shall be in the West Country two hours later, and a trap will be waiting to take me to my cottage. You should see it, old man—just three rooms, low ceilings and oaken beams, and a door that is sunk two steps below the roadway. Five bob a week, and all mine for a year. There's a room for you when you come."

"Sounds jolly enough! . . ." Humphrey sighed. "By George, I shall miss you when you've gone, Kenneth," he said. "There'll only be Willoughby left. It's funny how few real, social friendships there are in the Street, isn't it? Fellows know each other and all that, and feed together, but they always keep their private family lives apart. . . ."

"I'll tell you a secret if you promise not to crow. I *am* sorry to leave. I'm pretending to be light-hearted and gay, as a sort of rehearsal for Elizabeth—she'll be here soon—but, really and truly, I feel as if I were leaving part of myself behind in Fleet Street. Say something ludicrous, Humphrey; be ridiculous and save me from becoming mawkish over the parting."

"I can't," Humphrey admitted miserably. "It gives me the hump to sit in this bare room, and to think of all the talks we've had—"

"You've got to come here on Monday again, and see that Carter Paterson takes away the big box."

"I shall send a boy from the office: I won't set foot in the room again.... Wonder who'll live here next?" he added inconsequently.

"Donno," Kenneth replied, absently looking at his watch. "They're not bad rooms for the price. I say, it's time Elizabeth were here."

Their talk drifted aimlessly to and fro for the next quarter of an hour. They had already said everything they had to say on the subject of the journey. A feeling of depression and loneliness stole over Humphrey: his mind travelled to the days of his friendship with Wratten, and he was experiencing once more the sharp sense of loss that he had experienced when Wratten died.

There came a knock at the door, and Elizabeth appeared, bringing with her, as she always did, an atmosphere of gladness and peace. Her beautiful face, in the shadows of her large brimmed hat, her brilliant eyes, and the supple grace of her figure elated him: he came forward to greet her gaily. Sorrow could not live in her presence.

"I'm sorry I'm late," she said. "But I've kept the cab waiting.... Well, have you two said your sobbing farewells?"

Kenneth kissed her. "Don't make a joke of the

sacred moments . . . we were on the verge of a tearful breakdown. My tears spring from the fact that he has given me no parting gift."

"Good Lord! I forgot all about it." Humphrey produced from his pocket a small brown-paper parcel. "It's a pipe—smoke it, and see in the smoke visions of Fleet Street."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Kenneth, conjuring up a similar parcel; "that's just what I bought for you. A five-and-sixpenny one, too."

"Then I've lost," Humphrey said, with mock gloom. "Mine cost six-and-six. He'll have to pay the cab, Elizabeth, won't he?"

"If you two are going to stand there talking nonsense Kenneth will miss the train. Come along! I'll carry the little bag. Can you both manage the big one?"

Both of them cunningly kept up their artificially high spirits. Even when Kenneth switched off the electric light, and the room was in darkness, except for a pallid moonbeam that accentuated the bareness of the floor and walls, they parodied their own feelings. They were both a little ashamed of the sentimental that was in them.

But as the cab drove out of Fleet Street, they were silent. The lights were flaming in the upper rooms, but the offices of *The Herald* and *The Day* and the rest of the large dailies were unlit and silent, for Sunday gave peace to them on Saturday night. But Fleet Street itself was still alive, and the offices of the Sunday papers were active, and the noise of the presses, without which no day passes in the Street, would soon be heard. . . .

Half an hour later, under the great glass roof of Paddington Station, the last farewells had been said.

Nothing but a "So long, old man," and a "Good-bye" and a tight handshake marked the breaking of another thread of friendship. Humphrey watched the train curve outwards and away into the darkness with that queer

emotion that always comes when one is left standing on a railway platform, and a lighted train has moved out, full of life behind its lit windows, leaving in its place a glistening, empty stretch of rails.

Elizabeth was fluttering a valedictory handkerchief to the shadows. Humphrey touched her arm gently.

"Shall we go now?" he said.

"I suppose we'd better." These were awkward, uneasy moments. He would have liked to have told her how much he felt the passing of Kenneth, but he was afraid of hurting her, for he knew that she, too, was saddened at his departure.

"You'll let me see you home, won't you?" he asked.

"Would you? Thanks, so much."

They passed out of the station, and he called a hansom. His hand held her arm firmly as he helped her into the cab. She thanked him with her eyes. The moment was precious. It seemed that he had taken Kenneth's place; that, henceforth, she would look to him for protection.

They rode in silence through the lamp-lit terraces, where the white houses stood tall and ghostly, flinging their shadows across the road. There was nothing for him to say. He knew that their thoughts were running in the same groove. The sudden clear ray of a lamp flashed intermittently as the cab came into the range of its light, and he could see her face, serene, thoughtful, and very beautiful. It made him think of the photograph that lay in his pocket, against his heart. . . . She was very close to him, closer than she had ever been before, so close that he had but to put out his arms and draw her lips to his. Never again, he thought, would she be as close to him as she was at this moment. And the memory of Lilian intruded . . . and with the memory came a vision of just such a ride homewards in a hansom. . . . Ah, but Elizabeth was of a finer fibre,—

a higher being altogether. His body tingled at his thoughts. His imagination ran riot in the long silence, and he did not seek to check it.

He was seized by an indefinite impulse to hazard all his future in the rashness of a moment, to take her and kiss her, and tell her that he loved her.

"Here we are," she said, with a sudden movement as the cab jolted to a standstill.

He sighed. How calm and remote she seemed from love.

"You must come in for a moment and have something."

He hesitated from conventional politeness.

"The drive has been cold," she said. "I will ask Ellen to mix you a whisky and soda; and I daresay she's left some sandwiches for us."

"For us!" There was an inestimable touch of intimacy about those words.

"Thanks," he said (was his voice really as strange and as husky as it sounded to his ears?) "Thanks—if I won't be keeping you up."

Again, that suggestion of close acquaintance and absolute familiarity, as she let herself and him into the house with her latchkey, and closed the door softly on the world outside. It was all nothing to her. She moved about with perfect self-possession, unaware of the agitation within him.

"Let me turn up the light," she said, leading the way into the sitting-room.

He stumbled against something in the feeble light.

"Mind," she cried, laughingly. "Don't knock my treasures over."

And then, suddenly, the room was in utter darkness.

He heard her make an impatient murmur of annoyance. "There! I've turned it the wrong way. . . . Don't move . . . . I know where the matches are."

He heard the rustle of her dress, and her breathing, and the faint fragrance of her pervaded the darkness. He stood there in the black room with the blood surging in his veins, and pulses that seemed to be hammering against the silence. He could feel the throbbing of his temples. She moved about the room, and once she came near to him, so near that her hair seemed to float across his face with a caress that was soft and silken . . . clearly in his brain he pictured her, smiling, pure and beautiful . . . . this darkness was becoming intolerable. He made a step towards her. . . .

And the room was lit with a brightness that blurred his sight with the sudden transition from darkness. He saw her standing by the gas-bracket, with a look of concern on her face.

"Humphrey!" she cried, "is anything the matter with you?"

He was standing in a direct line with the oval mirror on the wall, and he caught the glimpse of a white face, with straining eyes and blanched lips, that he scarcely recognized as his own. She came to his side, tenderly solicitous.

He could bear it no longer. The words came from him in faltering sentences.

"Elizabeth," he cried. "Don't you know . . . I love you, I love you."

Her face flushed with perfect beauty.

"Oh—Humphrey . . ." she said.

And by the intimation of her voice, half-reproachful, and yet charged with infinite pity and love, he knew that, if he were bold enough, he could take her and hold her for evermore.

"I love you . . . I love you . . ." he said, drawing her unresistingly towards him. And there was nothing in life comparable to the exquisite happiness of that miraculous moment when her lips met his.

VIII

HE seemed to have reached out and touched the very summit of life in that swift moment of supreme excellence. His whole being vibrated with the splendour of living. He felt as he had felt that night when those three grand chords struck by Dyotkin had stirred the depths of his soul. . . .

And then his moment faded away into the irrevocable past, as she disengaged herself with a gentle, graceful movement, and they stood facing each other in silence. He saw her eyes, inexpressibly mild and soft, droop downwards, as she bent her head; he marked the colour mounting up her cheeks, flushing faintly the whiteness of her neck, and her fingers straying nervously in the thin, golden loop of the chain that fell across her bosom.

The wonder of his emotions dazed him. All that he could realize was that, in the space of a second, their relations had been absolutely changed. Henceforth, she appeared to him in another aspect. Quite suddenly and swiftly they had become isolated from all the countless millions in the world by the sorcery of a kiss. It seemed unreal and absurd to him. He wanted to laugh.

"You had better sit down," she said in a low voice, that had a note of appeal in it. "I hear Ellen coming. . . . It will not do to let her notice anything. . . ."

Astonishing, he thought, how tranquil and undisturbed she could remain. She could talk to Ellen as if nothing at all had happened; she could hand him sandwiches and prattle about little things as long as Ellen

was in the room, and even when the door closed on Ellen she seemed loath to let him speak.

But he stopped her, emboldened by the privilege of his love. He went over to her and, placing his hands on each side of her face, drew her forehead towards his kiss, and looked at her with sparkling, victorious eyes.

"You have made me happier than I have ever been," he said. "I will be very grateful and good to you."

Her eyes met his searchingly. "You will, really?" she asked.

"Really," he said, and he kissed her again.

Now they could talk—he had so much to say. With her acceptance of his pledge, her smiling "Really," and his reply, he became normal again. His thoughts descended from their eminence and came back to their matter of fact, everyday plane.

"Tell me," he said, with a lover's vanity, "when did you first know that I loved you?"

"I don't know . . ." she said. "Perhaps to-night."

"Only to-night!" he echoed, disappointed. "Oh, I have loved you long before this. I think it began when we went to the forest together that day with the children. . . . I shall be able to help you with your work," he cried, buoyantly, "or will you drop it now?"

She laughed merrily. "How you hurry things on!" she said. "Give me time to think, like a good boy. We're not going to be married to-morrow, are we?"

"No . . . no," he protested, "I didn't mean that. Let's have a really long, lovely engagement. Give me months in which I can do all sorts of things for you; we'll see things together that I've never seen before—museums and picture-galleries. Do you know, there's hundreds of things in London I've never seen."

"Why not?"

"I put off the seeing until I go there with my love."

The consummate joy of the hour infected him. He

walked up and down the room promising great things . . . vanity and egotism tinged his talk.

"I shall get on, you know. I shall do something great in Fleet Street, one day. There's no knowing where I shall stop. And then there are the books I mean to write. Oh yes! Kenneth's sown the seeds of book-writing in me. And plays . . . plays are the things to make money with . . ."

"You won't need money," she said, kindly. "I have enough for both of us."

"Dearest," he answered. (It seemed the most natural thing in the world, now, that he should call her "dearest.") "You must not say that. . . . You won't mind waiting, just a little, will you? Until I feel I can come to you and say that I do not need your money. . . . I can't explain it . . . I should never be happy if I took a penny from you."

She took his hand and caressed it. "I like you all the better for that, Humphrey." (He noticed that she did not use the word "love.")

He saw the future splendid, and roseate. He thought, with a smile, of Ferrol. Ferrol could not check him now. He had made his own identity, he was conscious of his own will to achieve that which he set out to do. Besides, there was such a difference between Lilian and Elizabeth.

He emerged from the house, a new being in a new world, living in the amazement of the last hour.

IX

It seemed strange to him that, with such a change in his life, the old work should proceed unaltered: he stood in Rivers' room, listening to Rivers' talk and banter as the news-editor gave him his work to do; he came before Selsey at night, copy in hand; he mingled with the reporters in their big, bare room, talking of the day's paper, and discussing their jobs and their troubles with them; he came into that close, personal contact with men whom he knew, and men who knew him, and yet there was always an abyss that divided his two lives.

So it was with all of them: in their friendship they seemed to say, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no further"; their homes, their private sorrows and eager hopes, the real lives that they lived, in fact, were left behind them with the closing of their house-door, and they came to the office different beings.

Those matters that touched their innermost lives were never discussed. Occasionally, the birth of a baby in the home of a reporter or a sub-editor would bring a queer suggestion of humanity and ordinary life into their affairs: sometimes, the news would filter through of a wife seriously ill in some home at Herne Hill or Wimbledon, and there were solicitous inquiries (Ferrol would send down the greatest specialist in one of those deep, generous moods of his), for the rest they displayed no interest in each other's private affairs.

As a matter of fact, it was assumed, by the law of the Street, that they had no private lives of their own. It is impossible to imagine Humphrey saying: "If you

please, I am engaged to be married, may I have the evening off," if at seven in the evening anything from a fire at the docks to the kidnapping of a baby occurred.

Therefore he told no one of the new wonder that had come into his life, not even Tommy Pride, who, by the way, had of late taken to sending out for a glass of whisky and soda, and doing his work with the glass before him on the table. They looked at each other in the reporters' room, and sighed, "Poor old Tommy."

Least of all would he tell Ferrol. He would have liked to have gone to Ferrol, and told him, but he remembered Ferrol's outburst. He was older now, and he could not trust himself to listen calmly to the old arguments. And he felt that it would be a slur on Elizabeth if he were forced to plead the cause of his marriage. . . .

So the days followed each other, and he was happy with that mixed happiness which is, perhaps, the most perfect. After the first great moment when he had declared his love, their relations had fallen back to their original groove. It was safer thus: one could not live always on the exalted plane of that moment.

His love-affair with Elizabeth Carr was of a different calibre from that with Lilian. It was truer, and rested on a firmer basis of friendship, but it lacked the ardour, and the passionate moments and kisses of the days when love held the ascendancy over his work. . . .

Once, when he was moved with most eager desire during one of their lonely meetings, he caught her to him, and kissed her, and he was conscious of an unspoken reproach in her lips and eyes, that took from him, for the moment, all the savour of his love.

It seemed to him that he was most successful when he was not playing the lover, when they met just as if they were rather exceptional friends instead of betrothed, and this irked him from time to time. He wanted to

love, and be loved, he wanted to give all and take all. But when, in those rare moods, she answered his kisses recklessly, she was splendidly beautiful and magnificent, atoning lavishly for all that she had withheld from him.

In one thing this wooing ran parallel with the wooing of Lilian: there were the same interruptions and postponement of plans; Fleet Street for ever intruded, and always there was the remorseless, inexorable conflict between his love and his career.

After an unfortunate week of shattered plans for spending an evening together, she sighed impatiently. "I wish you would give up Fleet Street," she said. "You could do better work."

"Oh!" he said, light-heartedly, "one day I will. I'll sit down and write my book. But it's too soon yet."

She looked at him with doubt in her eyes. She seemed to be feeling her way through the dark corridors of his mind.

"But surely you don't like the work," she said.

He laughed. "Some days I don't, and some days I do. Some days I think it loathsome, and some days I think it glorious. . . . We're all like that."

A day came when he thought it glorious, when Fleet Street gave him of its best, a swift reward for his allegiance.

He was in the reporters' room one evening, talking the latest office gossip with Jamieson and Willoughby, which concerned the marriage of *The Day's* Miss Minger, with young Hartopp of *The Gazette*. It was an event in Fleet Street, marking, in its way, the end of the epoch of the woman reporter.

"I don't think a reporters' room is a fit place for a woman," Willoughby said. "They're all right for their special work—cooking and dress and weddings, and all

that—but hard, right-down chasing after stories is man's work."

"I didn't mind Miss Minger," remarked Humphrey. "She was a jolly good sport, but women have us at a disadvantage. Remember that time when we all fell down on the gun-running story at Harwich, and Miss Minger sailed in, smiled her prettiest, and squeezed a scoop out of them."

"Ah, well," Jamieson said. "They're all the same . . . marriage, you know, and a happy home, with jolly children. They soon find out that it's better to let hubby do the reporting. . . . Hullo, young man Trinder, what do you want?" he said, breaking off as the pink-faced secretary stood in the doorway.

"*You're* wanted," Trinder said, nodding to Humphrey.

"Me!" said Humphrey. "What's up?"

"Ferrol wants you."

"My word!" said Willoughby. "Are you going to be sacked, or is your salary to be raised?"

"Our blessings on you," cried Jamieson, as he followed Trinder out of the room, upstairs, and along the corridor to Ferrol's door.

Ferrol stood with his hat and coat on waiting for him.

"Oh, Quain," he said, shortly. "Get your things and come along. I want to talk to you."

Humphrey paused, bewildered. "Hurry up," said Ferrol. He took his watch from his pocket, glanced at it, and clicked its case hurriedly. "I've got to be back here at ten."

"Very well, sir," said Humphrey. He ran back to the reporters' room, and gathered together his hat and his coat and his stick.

"What's up?" chorused Jamieson and Willoughby.

"Lord knows!" he gasped. "*He* wants me to go somewhere or the other with him."

"Most certainly you are either going to be sacked

or have your salary raised," remarked Willoughby. "But if you are going to be made editor, be kind to us when you are all-powerful."

"Ass!" laughed Humphrey, in reply.

He went back. Ferrol made a noise of satisfaction, and led the way out of his room, carefully switching off the lights. Down the stairs they went, side by side, Humphrey walking beside the mighty Ferrol, just as he did in his dreams. Down the stairs they went, and the men coming up—his colleagues—raised their hats to Ferrol, for they always gave him respect, and the heart of him throbbed with the strangeness of it all.

The commissionaire saluted stiffly, and gazed at Humphrey with a new esteem. A small boy in uniform darted with haste before them, and opened the door of a limousine car, reflecting the lights of the night in its lacquered brilliance. The chauffeur touched the polished peak of his hat. It seemed that everybody paid homage to Ferrol, greatest of all men in the eyes of Humphrey Quain.

For this man was the symbol, the personification of the Street and the paper for which he had worked with all his heart, with all his might, and with all his soul.

He stood aside to let Ferrol step into the car first, but Ferrol, with a smile, urged him into the lighted interior. He received an impression of superlative comfort and riches in that small, blue-lined room with its little electric lamp overhead. There were rugs of deliciously soft camel-hair, and, as he settled in the yielding cushions, his outstretched feet struck something hard, that gave warmth instantly, even through the leather of his boots. A silver cone-shaped holder, filled with red roses, confronted him; their very scent suggested ease and luxury. There were touches of silver everywhere: an ash-tray at his right hand, a whistle attached to a speaking tube, and a row of books in a

silver case—an A B C Railway Guide, a diary, an address book, and a postal guide. They gave the Ferrol touch of concentrated energy, even in these surroundings of comfortable, upholstered rest.

The car sped along with a soft movement, almost noiseless, except for the low purring of its engines. Through the windows, past the strong face of Ferrol, he caught glimpses of a wet world with people walking upon their own reflections in the glistening pavements, of ragged beggars slouching along with hunched-up shoulders, of streaming crowds passing and repassing, ignoring entirely the passage of this splendid, immaculate room on wheels, never questioning the right of those people within it to the shelter which was denied to them.

And he felt extraordinarily remote from all these people: an odd thrill of contempt for them moved him to think: "What fools they are not to get cars for themselves." It was as if he had been suddenly translated to another world: a world inhabited by a superior race of men and women, almost god-like in the power of their possessions, who looked down on other struggling mortals from their exalted plane, with a vision blurred by warmth and security.

The silence enchanted him. If Ferrol had spoken, the spell of that journey would have been snapped. The silence enabled him to enjoy to the full the extraordinary sensation of being whirled along in the darkness by the side of Ferrol towards some unknown destiny. The discipline had made him always regard Ferrol with awe; but now, as he sat wrapped in the warm rugs of the motor-car, the social barriers dropped. He wondered why Ferrol was doing this.

The speed of the car slackened gradually. He caught a glimpse of railings and the lights shining among the trees, bringing back to him the old memories of his first impression of the park. But they were on the

Kensington side, and the breadth of the park from Bayswater to Kensington made all the difference. Here there seemed to be a culture and dignity in the very houses themselves : they did not suggest the overbearing, self-made prosperity of that broad road that ran parallel with it on the other side of the trees and meadows.

A servant stood by the open door of the car. His face was implacably dignified. His white shirt-front and tie were splendidly correct for his station, in that he wore three obvious bone studs and a black tie. He held the door of the house open, and Humphrey followed Ferrol inside.

He had been to many houses such as this as a reporter, when he had waited with a sense of social inferiority in halls hung with old masters, and furnished with rare old oak . . . at those times the servants had treated him with a mixture of deference and contempt. But this was different : respectful, eager hands relieved him of his coat and hat ; vaguely he knew he had to follow one of the owners of these hands up a broad staircase, along a soft carpeted passage, to a room which, suddenly flooded with light, showed its possession of a basin fitted with shining silver taps. He washed luxuriously ; the towels were warm to the touch. He felt at peace with the world.

Down the stairs again, with a portrait on the white panelled wall for each step, to the inner hall lined with tapestries and brocade, where a bronze statue held an electric torch aloft to light the way to the dining-room.

Ferrol was standing by the fire. "Chilly to-night," he said, as Humphrey came into the room. His voice echoed in the spacious loneliness of the room.

"Yes," said Humphrey, "it is." He hesitated a moment, and then added "sir." It seemed the correct thing to do, though Ferrol and he might have been, for all that had happened in the last half-hour, excellent personal friends, of equal status in the world.

"Come and warm yourself," said Ferrol, motioning him to a high-backed chair by the fire. Humphrey sat down, and put his hands to the fire. This room with its bright lights and its high ceiling filled him with a realization of his own comparative poverty. The walls, again, reflected the artistic in Ferrol.

His glance wandered to the table. Dishes of delicacies in aspic and mayonnaise gave colour to the white glitter of glass and silver. A bowl of great chrysanthemums rose out of the centre-piece of crystal, whose lower tiers were crowded with peaches, apricots, green figs, grapes, and other exotic fruits. . . .

A whimsical vision came to him of a sausage-shop in Fleet Street where, often, kept late on a job, without opportunity for dinner, he had sat on a high stool at the counter eating sausages and onions and potatoes as they came hot from the sizzling trays of fat in the window. The thought made him smile.

"What's the joke?" asked Ferrol, smiling too.

Humphrey went a diffident pink. After all, why shouldn't he tell Ferrol? He was quite right: the great man bubbled with laughter. He saw the ingenuousness of the thought. It endeared Humphrey to him.

"Ah, young man," he said, "I know that shop."

Humphrey's eyebrows raised.

"I've passed it many a time and seen the inviting sausages. By God!" he continued, bringing his fist down on the mantelpiece, "I'd give you everything on the table, every night of your life, if I could go in and sit at the counter and eat them." He laughed. "So don't you be in too much of a hurry to give up sausages."

A servant appeared, bearing a silver soup-tureen. Ferrol sat at the top of the table, and Humphrey took the seat at his right hand. The soup was clear and delicious, possessing a faint, elusive flavour of sherry. While he was eating, he became aware of the butler

pouring light-coloured wine into a high stemmed glass. He looked up and saw Ferrol regarding his wine glass.

"It's all I drink," said Ferrol. "A little hock with dinner. In my day, many a fellow was ruined with too much drink. Are they as bad now?" he asked.

It was a strange experience to have Ferrol question him on the doings of the Street.

"Oh no!" he said, hastily, "there's not much of that now. Perhaps a half dozen or so here and there, but nothing serious." (But he thought of the shaking hand of Tommy Pride as he spoke.)

"None of my men drink, eh?" Ferrol said. It was more of an assertion than a query. "Do you know we've got the finest staff in London—in England."

During the whole of that delightful dinner Humphrey listened to Ferrol talking about the men with whom he worked. He knew them all: knew all that they had done, and all that they were capable of doing. He asked Humphrey's opinion on this man and that man, and listened attentively to the reply. Sometimes Humphrey made a joke, and Ferrol laughed.

And, as the dinner progressed, and the clear, cold wine invigorated his mind and warmed his perceptions, he conceived a greater liking for this man, who was so human at the core of him. In the office one saw him with the distorted, disciplined view, as an unapproachable demi-god, surrounded by people who sacrificed his name to their own advancement. Ah! if one could always be on these terms of privileged intimacy with him, what a difference it would make in the work. If one dared tell Ferrol of the obstacles and the petty humiliations that obscured the path to good work for the sake of the paper. . . .

"Tell me," said Ferrol, suddenly, pushing bunches of black grapes towards him—"tell me about Easterham, and your life there."

Now, what could there be in Easterham and its monotonous life to interest Ferrol, thought Humphrey.

Nevertheless, he told him of Easterham, and the *Easterham Gazette* on which he had worked. That amused Ferrol vastly. And he had to answer oddly insistent questions—to describe the Market Square, and the Cathedral close, with its rooks and ivy. It astonished him to find how interested Ferrol was in these little things, and almost before he was aware of it, he found himself speaking of personal matters, of things that touched his own inner, private life, of his aunt (with her stern gospel of "Getting On"), of the mother whom he did not remember, and of Daniel Quain, his father.

And as he talked on, he saw suddenly that Ferrol was listening in a detached manner, and it occurred to him that he had rather overstepped the limits of a reply to a polite inquiry. He became confused and shy. His reminiscences withered within him. Ferrol tried to urge him along the old track.

"He's only doing it out of politeness," thought Humphrey. "I shan't tell him any more. He's making fun of me."

He cracked walnuts in silence and sipped at the port. (Ferrol touched neither nuts nor wine.) He did not interpret that air of detached interest with which Ferrol had listened to him as meaning anything else but boredom.

He did not know that, as he was speaking, the old years came back again to Ferrol, bringing with them once again the vision of Margaret and those secret walks outwards from Easterham, under the white moon of romance and love and supple youth that could be his never more.

Ferrol sighed.

"You ought to be very happy," he said. "I think

the happiest time of my life was when I was reporting."

"Were you ever a reporter?" asked Humphrey.

"Oh yes! I didn't buy *The Day* at once."

He rose and went to a cabinet to fetch silver and enamelled boxes of cigars and cigarettes. The cigarettes were oval and fat.

"I don't think you've had enough scope," said Ferrol, handing him a lighted match. "You've done well . . . not as well as I hoped . . . but perhaps you'd do better elsewhere."

A peculiar sensation attacked Humphrey in the regions of his throat and heart. ("Most certainly you are to have your salary raised or be sacked.") He waited tensely.

The butler came into the room, apologetically.

"Half-past nine, sir," he said; "the car's waiting, sir."

"Oh—yes. I forgot. I've got to be back at the office. . . . All right, Wilson.

"Let me see—what was I saying. . . . Oh yes, broader scope. Can you speak French?" he asked abruptly.

"Just what I learnt at school. . . . I can read the papers."

"You'll easily pick it up. . . . Look here, I'll give you a lift back to Fleet Street. Do you want to go there?"

"Yes," said Humphrey, and then, suddenly, for some odd reason, he thought of Elizabeth. He was not very sure of his geography, but the street in which she lived could not be far from here. "I think I'd rather walk, if you don't mind . . . I've got a call to make." He wanted to tell Elizabeth how splendid Ferrol had been to him.

"Oh well! It doesn't matter. Come and see me

at twelve to-morrow. I'm going to send you to Paris."

"Paris!" echoed Humphrey, as if Ferrol had promised him Paradise.

"Paris," repeated Ferrol. "We're changing our correspondent."

X

HE did not go to Elizabeth that night : he walked, in a dream, past Knightsbridge and up Piccadilly, contemplating the fulfilment of all his dreams. Everything seemed possible now. He was a young man—and Ferrol was going to give him Paris ; he was a young man—and Elizabeth had given him her love. The sequence of this thought was significant.

It would be very fine to tell her. . . . At last he was lifted out of the rut into a field of new endeavour. From Paris the path led to other cities, of course—to Petersburg, Vienna, and Rome. One day he would see them all. Life became at once very broad and open.

He walked on, an un-noteworthy figure in the throng of people that moved along Piccadilly, his thoughts surging with the prospects of his new life.

"Humphrey Quain . . . Paris Correspondent of *The Day*."

He murmured that to himself. Glorious title! Splendid Ferrol. How noble was this work in Fleet Street, holding out great promises to those who served it well, and sacrificed everything on its altar. How could one abandon a calling where fortune may change in a moment?

He passed through astonishing ranks of women whose eyes and lips simulated love: one or two of them spoke to him in foreign accents. He passed on across the Circus where the lights of the Variety Theatres made a blur of yellow in the nebulous night.

His steps led him again to Fleet Street, and he walked with the joy of a man treading the soil of his own

country. It was always the same when he passed the Griffin: deep satisfaction took hold of him at the sight of the signs in all the buildings, telling of newspapers all the world over, in this narrow Street in which the lives of him and his kind were centred. The fascination of the Street was perpetual. It belonged to him. It belonged to all of them. At every hour of the day and night there were always friends to be met.

He turned into the cheery warmth of the Pen Club —friends everywhere and Fleet Street smiling! There was laughter at the wooden counter, where Larkin was telling some story to a group of men.

"Well, the next day I thought I'd go up and inquire after his lordship's health. The butler was very kind. 'Come in,' he said. 'His lordship's expecting you.' So up I went, thinking I was going to get a fine story—he was supposed to be dangerously ill in bed, mind you."

Humphrey joined the group and listened. ("Have a drink?" said Larkin, turning to him. "It's my shout.")

"Well," continued Larkin, "when I got to the room, there was his lordship in pants and undervest—you know how fat he is—with dumb-bells in his hands and whirling his arms about like a windmill. 'Do I *look* like a dying man?' he said, dancing lightly on his toes. 'Go back, young man, and tell your editor what you've seen. Good-morning.'"

"Talking of funny experiences," said one of the others, "I remember—" And so it went on, story after story, of real things happening in the most extraordinary way. It was all this that Humphrey enjoyed, this interchange of experiences, this telling of stories that were never written in newspapers, that belonged alone to them.

Presently Tommy Pride came in. "Hullo all!" he said. "Hullo! young Quain—been busy to-day?"

They sat down together, and Humphrey noticed that Tommy's face had changed greatly, even in the last few months. The flesh was loose and colourless, and the eyes had a nervous, wandering look in them.

"Ferrol's going to send me to Paris—he told me so to-night," Humphrey blurted out.

"Splendid," said Tommy. "Good for you." And then a look of great pathos crept into his eyes, and he seemed to grow very old all at once. "I wish I had all your chances," he said wistfully. "I wonder what will be the end of me. . . . I hear they're making changes."

"Don't you bother," Humphrey said. "Ferrol knows what you're worth. . . . But, I say, Tommy, you don't mind, do you . . . aren't you taking too much of *that*," he pointed to the whisky glass.

"Oh, hell! What does it matter," said Tommy. "What does anything matter. . . . I'm a little worried . . . they're thinking of making changes," he repeated aimlessly.

It was all settled in a few minutes the next morning. The Paris appointment was definitely confirmed: he was to leave immediately. He hastened to Elizabeth to tell her the wonderful news. It never occurred to him that she could be otherwise than pleased and proud at his success. But her manner was recondite and baffling.

"Have you accepted the post?" she asked.

"Why, of course," he said. "How could I refuse such a chance."

She regarded him dubiously. "No—you could not refuse it. I don't blame you for not refusing it. I think I know how you feel. . . ."

"It's splendid!" Humphrey cried. His voice rang with enthusiasm. "Fancy Ferrol singling me out. It

will be the making of me. . . . It might lead to anything."

"But weren't you only going to stay in journalism for another year, Humphrey?"

"Oh, of course, when I said that, I couldn't foresee that this was going to happen. . . . Elizabeth," he said suddenly, with a great fear on him, "do you want me to give it up now?"

"No . . . no," she said in haste. "You don't understand. It's so difficult to make you see. I wasn't prepared for this. . . ." She laughed for no reason at all. "I am glad of your success. I am glad you're happy. . . . Of course, you don't expect me to come to Paris, like this, at a moment's notice. You must give me time."

He smiled with relief. "Why, of course, I didn't imagine I could carry you away at once. . . . But after a few months, perhaps. It will take me a few months to get used to the work."

"Yes," she agreed, "after a few months. We shall see."

Her face was strangely sorrowful. Her attitude perplexed him. It hurt him to find that she did not share in his rejoicings. It took away some of the savour of his success.

He thought he was the master of his destiny. He could not discern the hand of Ferrol moving him again towards a crisis in his life.

PART IV

PARIS

I

THE noise of Paris came to him through the open windows, a confusion of trivial sounds utterly different from the solid, strong note that London gave forth. It was the noise of a nursery of children playing with toys —he heard the continuous jingle of bells round the necks of the horses that drew the cabs, the shouts of men crying newspapers, the squeaking horns of motor-cars, and, every afternoon, at this hour, the sound of some pedlar calling attention to his wares, with a trumpet that had a tinny sound.

At intervals the voice of Paris, modified by the height at which he lived and the distance he was from the Grands Boulevards, sent a shout to him that reminded him of London. That was when a heavy rumbling shook the narrow street which was one of the tributaries of the Boulevards, as a monstrous, unwieldy omnibus, drawn by three horses abreast, rolled upwards on its passage to the Gare du Nord. The horses' hoofs slapped the street with the clatter of iron on stone, and the passing of the omnibus drowned every other sound with its thunder, so that when it had gone, and the echoes of its passage had died away, the voice of Paris seemed more mincing and playful than before.

Humphrey had been in Paris six months now, but the first impression that the city gave had never been erased from his mind.

At first the name had filled him with a curious kind of awe: Paris and the splendour of its art and life, and the history which linked the centuries together; all the history of the Kings of France which he did not know,

and the rest that he knew with the vagueness of a somewhat neglected education—the bloody days of the Revolution, the siege, the Commune; Paris, the cockpit of history and the pleasure-house of the world. There was some enchantment in the thought of going to Paris, not as a mere visitor, but as a worker, one who was to share the daily lives of the people.

And he had arrived in the evening of a February day, in the crisp cold, bewildered by the strangeness of the station. The huge engine had dragged him and his fellows—Englishmen chiefly, travelling southwards, and eastwards, and westwards in search of sunshine—across the black country of France, into the greener, sweeter meadows of the Valley of the Loire, with tall poplars on the sky-line, through the suburbs with their red and white houses looking as if they had been built yesterday, to the vaulted bareness of the Gare du Nord. There, as it puffed and panted, like a stout, elderly gentleman out of breath, it seemed to gasp: "I've done my part. Look after yourselves."

To leave the train was like leaving a friend. One stepped to the low platform and became an insect in a web of blue-bloused porters, helpless, eager to placate, afraid of creating a disturbance. It seemed to Humphrey in those first few moments that these people were inimical to him; they spoke to him roughly and without the traditional politeness of French people. The black-bearded ticket-collector snatched the little Cook's pocket-book from his hand, tore out the last tickets, and thrust it back on him, murmuring some complaint, possibly because Humphrey had not unclasped the elastic band. There was bother about luggage too; Heaven knows what, but he waited dismally and hungrily in the vast room, with its flicker of white light from the arc-lamps above the low counters at which the Customs-men, in their shabby uniforms, seemed to be quarrelling

with one another, their voices pitched in the loud key that is seldom used in England.

He was required to explain and explain again to three or four officials; something of a minor, technical point, he gathered, was barring him from his baggage. His French was not quite adequate to the occasion; but it was maddening to see them shrug their shoulders with a movement that suggested that they rejoiced in his discomfiture. . . . It was all straightened out, somehow, by a uniformed interpreter, a friendly man who came into Humphrey's existence for a moment, and passed out of it in a casual way, a professional dispenser of sympathy and help, expecting no more reward than a franc or so for services that deserved a life-long gratitude.

But when the cabman had shouted at him, and the blue-bloused porters (one had attached himself to each of his four pieces of baggage) had insisted on their full payment, and after there had been an exchange of abuse between the cabman and an itinerant seller of violets, whose barrow had nearly been run down, Humphrey looked out of the window and caught his first glimpses of Paris . . . of the light that suggested warmth and laughter.

He saw great splashes of light, and through the broad glass windows of the cafés a vision of cosy rooms, bustling with the business of eating, of white tables at which men and women sat — ordinary middle-class people. The movement of their arms and shoulders and heads showed that conversation was brisk during their meal; they smiled at one another.

As the cab sped softly along on its pneumatic tyres, he saw picture after picture of this kind, set in its frame of light. "I shall like living here," he thought. Chance decreed that the Rue le Peletier was being repaired, and the cab swung out of the narrower streets into the

vivid and wonderful brilliance of the Boulevard des Italiens.

The street throbbed with light and life. He was in a broad avenue with windows that blazed with splendid colour in the night. The faces of the clocks in the middle of the avenue were lit up ; the lamps of the flower and newspaper kiosks made pools of shining yellow on the pavement; and above him the red and golden and green of the illuminated advertisements came and went, sending their iridescence into the night. It was not one unbearable glare that startled the eyes, but a blend of many delicate and fine luminous tints: one café was lit with electric lights that gave out a soft pale rose colour, another was of the faintest blue, and a third a delicate yellow, and all these different notes of light rushed together in a lucent harmony.

Music floated to him as he passed slowly in the stream of bleating and jingling and hooting traffic. He saw the people sitting outside the cafés near braziers of glowing coal, calmly drinking coloured liquids, as though there were no such thing as work in the world.

And that was the thought that gave Humphrey his first impression of Paris. These people, it seemed, only played with life. There was something artificial and unreal about all these cafés: they played at being angry (that business at the Customs office was part of the game), an *agent* held up a little white baton to stop the traffic—playing at being a London policeman, thought Humphrey. He wondered whether this sort of thing went on always, with an absurd thought of the Paris he had seen at a London exhibition.

The cab veered out of the traffic down a side-street between two cafés larger than the rest, and, at the last glimpse of people sitting in overcoats and furs by the braziers, he laughed in the delight of it. "Why, they're playing at it being summer," he said to himself.

Six months had passed since that day, and he had seen Paris in many aspects, yet nothing could alter his first impression. The whole city was built as a temple of pleasure, a feminine city, with all the shops in the Rue Royale or the Avenue de l'Opera decked with fine jewels and sables. Huge emporiums everywhere, crowded with silks and ribbons and lace; wonderful restaurants, with soft rose-shaded lights and mauve and grey tapestries, as dainty as a lady's boudoir. Somewhere, very discreetly kept in the background, men and women toiled behind the scenes of luxury and pleasure . . . those markets in the bleak morning, and the factories on the outskirts of the city, and along the outer Boulevards one saw great-chested men and narrow-chested girls walking homewards from their day's work. But there was pleasure, even for these people: the material pleasure of life, and the spiritual pleasure of art and beauty. The first they could satisfy with a jolly meal in the little bright restaurants of their quarter with red wine and cognac; and of the second they could take their fill for nothing, if they were so minded, for it surrounded them in a scattered profusion everywhere.

Humphrey, in the Paris office of *The Day*, on the fourth floor of an apartment building in the Rue le Peletier, sat dreaming of all that had happened in the past six months. Wonderful months had they been to him! They had altered his whole perception of things. Here, in a new world and a new city, he was beginning to see things in a truer proportion. Fleet Street receded into the far perspective as something quite small and unimportant; the men themselves, even, seemed narrow-minded and petty, incapable of thinking more deeply than the news of the day demanded.

Humphrey, from the heights of his room in Paris, began to see how broad the world was, that it was finer

to deal with nations than individuals, and from his view Fleet Street appeared to him in the same relation as Easterham had appeared to him in London.

The clock struck five. Rivers and Neckinger and Selsey would be going into the conference now in Ferrol's room to discuss the contents of the paper.

"Anything big from Paris?" some one would be asking, or "What about Berlin?" . . . And he knew that every night they looked towards Paris, where amazing things happened, and he, Humphrey Quain, was Paris. That splendid thought thrilled him to the greatest endeavour. He was *The Day's* watchman in Paris, not only of all the news that happened in the capital, but of all the happenings in the whole territory of France.

A pile of cuttings from the morning's papers were on his desk. Here was a leading article on the Franco-German relations from the *Echo de Paris*—an important leading article, obviously inspired by the Quai D'Orsay. There was a two-column account of the Hanon case—an extraordinary murder in Lyons which English readers were following with great interest. There was a budget of "fait-divers," those astonishing events in which the fertility of the Paris journalist's imagination rises to its highest point. They supplied the "human interest." He had received a wire from London to interview a famous French actress, who was going to play in a London theatre, and that had kept him busy for the afternoon. The morning had been devoted to reading every Paris paper.

At five o'clock Dagneau arrived with the evening papers, bought from the fat old woman who kept the kiosk outside the Café Riche. He let himself into the flat with a latch-key, and appeared before Humphrey, a young man, immaculately dressed, with a light beard fringing his fat cheeks. Humphrey could never quite

overcome the oddness of having a bearded man as his junior. Dagneau was only twenty-two, but he had grown a beard since he was twenty; that was how youths played at being men. Humphrey called Dagneau "the lamb."

"Hullo," he said. "Anything special?"

Dagneau's pronunciation of English was as bad as Humphrey's pronunciation of French, but in both cases the vocabulary was immense.

"They're crying 'Death of the President' on the Boulevards," said Dagneau.

Humphrey leapt up. "Great Heavens! You don't say so!" he shouted, going to the telephone.

"Be not in a hurry, *mon vieux*." (Though Dagneau was his assistant, they dropped all formalities between themselves.) "It is in *La Presse*."

"But—"

"Calm yourself. *La Presse* is selling in thousands. The news is printed in great black letters across the front page."

"Is it true?" gasped Humphrey.

"It is true that the President is dead—but it is the President of Montemujo or something like that in South America, and not M. Loubet."

Dagneau laughed merrily and slapped the papers on the table. He took Humphrey by the shoulders and shook him playfully.

"I—would I let my old and faithful Englishman down?" he asked. The newspaper phrase spoken as Dagneau spoke it sounded delightful.

"By George, you gave me a shock," Humphrey laughed. "I thought I'd been dozing for an hour with the President dead. Dagneau, you are an *espèce de*—anything you like."

"Any telegrams from London?"

"One to interview Jeanne Granier. I've done it.

Will you go through the evening papers? Look out for the *Temps* comments on the Persian railway . . . they're running that in London. And the latest stuff about the Hanon case. I'll run round to *Le Parisien* and see what they've got."

He went down the winding staircase, past the red-faced concierge and his enormous wife, who knitted perpetually by the door ("*Pas des lettres, m'sieu*," she said, in answer to his inquiring look), and so into the street. A passing cabman held up his whip in appeal, and, as moments were precious now, Humphrey engaged him. They bowled along through the side-streets, and at the end of each he saw, repeated, the glorious opal and orange sunset over Paris: those magnificent sunsets that left the sky in a smother of golden and purple and dark clouds edged with livid light behind the steeple of St Augustine. They came to the building of *Le Parisien*, with whom *The Day* had an arrangement by which Humphrey could see their proofs evening and night, in exchange for extending the same privilege to the London Correspondent of *Le Parisien* at the offices of *The Day*.

He crossed the threshold into the familiar atmosphere of Fleet Street. Hurry and activity: young Frenchmen writing rapidly in room after room. Some of them knew him, looked up from their work and nodded to him. From below the printing-machines sent tremors through the building, as they rolled off the first edition for the distant provinces of France, and for the night trains to every capital of Europe. The same old work was going on here: the same incessant quest and record of news.

He went to the room of Barboux, the foreign editor.

"Good-evening," said Barboux, black-bearded, fat and bald-headed. He pronounced "evening" as though it were a French word, and it came out "événandje."

Barboux offered Humphrey a cigarette he had just rolled with black tobacco, and asked him most intimate questions of his doings in Paris, so that Humphrey had either to acknowledge himself a prude or a Parisian.

"All the same," said Barboux, "Paris is a wonderful city, *hein?*"

"It is," said Humphrey.

Barboux continued: "Is it not the most beautiful, the most wonderful, the most entrancing city in the world, young Englishman?"

"All except London," replied Humphrey.

"Rosbif — Goddam — I box your nose," laughed Barboux.

It was a set form of dialogue that took place every night between them, without variation, a joke invented by Barboux.

A man in an apron—a French version of the type in *The Day's* printing-office—brought in a budget of proofs.

"There is nothing that is happening, ain't it?" remarked Barboux, who always rendered *n'est ce pas* in this literal fashion.

"Apparently not," Humphrey agreed, glancing through the proofs. "When do they expect the verdict in the Hanon case?"

Barboux touched a bell. A young man appeared. His hair was fair and long, his clothes were faultless to the crease in the trousers turned up in the English style over patent-leather shoes with the laces tied in big bows. Barboux introduced him: "M. Charnac will tell you about the Hanon case."

The young man bowed in a charming manner, and spoke in a soft, delicious French, with a voice that was charged with courtesy and kindness.

"They do not expect a verdict to-night, m'sieu. The court has adjourned. I've just had the finish of our correspondent's message."

"*Merci*," said Humphrey.

"*Pas de quoi*," said Charnac, bowing.

Humphrey rose and bowed with the ultra politeness that was now part of his daily life. They shook hands.

"*Enchanté d'avoir fait votre connaissance*," and Charnac bowed once more.

"*Enchanté*," mumbled Humphrey.

Barboux was at the telephone, saying impatiently, "Ah-lo . . . Ah . . . lo." Humphrey put on his hat, Barboux extended his left hand—the greatest sign of friendship that a Frenchman can give, since it implies that he knows you too well for you to take offence at it.

"*À demain*," said Humphrey, as he went away.

When he came back to the office, work began in earnest. First of all he had to select from the budget of news on his table those items that would be most acceptable to English readers. That was no small matter on days when there were many things happening. It required sound judgment and a knowledge of what was best in news. Then there was always the question of the other correspondents of London newspapers: what were the other fellows sending?

He and Dagneau talked things over, and, finally, when they had decided what to transmit to London, the work of compiling the stories began. It was necessary to build up a coherent, comprehensive story out of the cuttings before him, in which all the points of the different papers should be mentioned. Dagneau helped him, making illiterate translations of leading articles, that needed revising and knocking into shape. Perhaps, even at the eleventh hour, a telegram might arrive from the London headquarters, setting them a new task, rendering void all the work they might have done.

After two hours' writing Humphrey laid down his pen. "Come along, my lamb," he said to Dagneau; "let us go to dinner."

Then they put on their hats and coats and went to Boisson's, a few doors away in the Rue le Peletier, where Père Boisson presided over a pewter counter, spread with glasses and bottles, and Mère Boisson superintended the kitchen, and Henri, the waiter, with a desperate squint, ran to and fro with his burden of plates, covering many miles every night by passing and repassing from the restaurant tables to the steamy recesses behind the door.

This was the part of Paris life that pleased Humphrey most.

They received him with cheery *Bons soirs*, and Henri paused in his race to set the chairs for them, and arrange their table. Yards of crisp bread were brought to them, and a *carafon* of the red wine from Touraine, whither M. Boisson went on a pilgrimage once a year to sample and buy for himself.

Little French olives and *filet d'hareng saur;* soup with sorrel floating in it; fish with black butter sauce; a *contre-filet* or a *vol au vent* deliciously cooked; Roquefort cheese, and, to wind up with, what M. Boisson called magnificently *Une Belle Poire*—this was the little dinner they had for something under three francs, and, of course, there was special coffee to follow, and, as a piece of extravagance, a liqueur of *mandarin* or *noyeau.*

"This is better than Fleet Street," said Humphrey, inhaling his cigarette and sipping at the excellent coffee. Boisson in his shirt-sleeves and apron came over to them and spoke to them with light banter. He also had a joke of his own: he conceived it to be the highest form of humour to interject "Aoh—yes—olright," several times during the conversation.

Madame Boisson waddled towards them, with an overflowing figure, and said, as if her future happiness depended on an answer in the affirmative, "*Vous avez bien diné, m'sieu.*"

The smell of food was pleasant here: there was no hurry; men and women concentrated all their attention on eating and enjoying their meal. The light shone on the glasses of red and white wine. It was a picture that delighted Humphrey.

And Dagneau was telling him of his adventures on the previous night with a little girl, the dearest little girl he had ever met, kissing the tips of his fingers to the air, whenever his emotions overcame him . . . and Humphrey smiled. This was a side of Paris of which he knew nothing. His thoughts went back to London where Elizabeth lived, beautiful and austere. "I must write to Elizabeth to-night," he thought.

At nine-twenty Dagneau caught the eye of Henri and made an imaginary gesture of writing on the palm of his left hand. "That's the way to get a perfect French accent," he said to Humphrey. Henri nodded in swift comprehension and appeared with a piece of paper on which illegible figures were scrawled. They paid and went away, with the Boissons and Henri calling farewells to them. Happy little restaurant in the Rue le Peletier!

They got back to the office just as the telephone bell was making a rattling din. Humphrey sat down and adjusted over his head the steel band that held the receivers close to his ears. Then, pulling the telephone closer to him, and spreading out before him all that he had written, he waited.

And, presently, sometimes receding and sometimes coming nearer above the hum and buzz that sounded like the wind and the waves roaring about the deep-sea cables, he heard the voice of Westgate coming from England. "Hallo . . . hallo . . . hallo. . . . That you, Quain. . . . Can't hear you. . . . Get another line . . . buzz—zz—zz . . . oooo. Ah! that's better." Westgate's voice became suddenly clear and vibrating

as though he were speaking from the next room. But Humphrey could see the little box in the sub-editors' room, where all the men were working round Selsey, and the messenger-boys coming and going with their flimsy envelopes; he could see the strained, eager face of Westgate, as he waited, pencil in hand . . . and he began.

He shouted the news of Paris for fifteen minutes, and at the end the perspiration wetted his forehead, and Westgate's good-night left him exhausted. Sometimes, when the wires were interfered with by a gale, the fifteen minutes were wasted in futile shouting and endeavour to be heard in London; sometimes Westgate would say bluntly: "Selsey says he doesn't want any of that story," when he began to read his carefully prepared notes. Those were desperate minutes, shouting to London against time.

"All well?" asked Dagneau, when he finished.

"I suppose so," Humphrey answered. "Westgate was in great form to-night—he was taking down at the rate of a hundred and twenty words a minute. . . ." He rose and stretched himself. "Will you pay the late call at the newspaper offices? I'll be at Constans in case anything happens."

Out again into the bright glamour of the Boulevards to Constans at the corner of the Place de l'Opera, in the shadow of the opera-house, to meet the other correspondents, and wait on the events of Europe, and drink brandy and soda or the light lager-beer that was sold at Constans.

It was a place where most of the Paris correspondents gathered, and, sometimes, the "Special Correspondents" came also. They were lofty people, who had long since left the routine of Fleet Street; the princes of journalism, who passed through Paris on their way to St Petersburg, to Madrid—to any part of Europe or the world where

there was unrest; war correspondents, and special commissioners; men who had letters of introduction from diplomat to diplomat, who talked with kings and chancellors, and interviewed sultans. They flitted through Paris whenever any big news happened, in twos and threes, only staying for a few hours at Constans to meet friends, and then on again by the midnight expresses . . .

They were a jolly lot of fellows who met in those days at Constans: O'Malley of *The Sentinel*, the fair-haired scholar who spoke of style in writing, and could speak French with an Irish accent and knew how to ask the waiter to "Apporthez des p'hommes de therrey"; Punter, who represented the Kelmscotts' papers, talked French politics late into the night, and wore a monocle that never dropped from his eye—not even in those exciting moments when Michael, his coal-black eyes and hair betraying his ancestry, crossed his path in argument.

At midnight Dagneau came in with word from the outside world. All was quiet. So Humphrey went back to the hotel in the Rue d'Antin, where he rented a room on the fifth floor by the month for eighty francs, including the morning roll and bowl of coffee. He wrote his letter to Elizabeth: he wanted her to come to Paris and share his life with him.

II

HE wanted her very much to share in the delight of those days. It was all so new and beautiful to him, so different from London. He went about the city, sometimes alone, sometimes with Dagneau for a companion, to the Louvre, where the Venus de Milo filled him with awe and wonder, or to the Luxembourg, with its statuary set among the green trees. In the afternoons, when he had any spare time, he would take a book and read in the Tuileries, or on one of the seats in the Champs Elysées, where the fat Norman and Breton nurses, with their broad coloured ribbons floating from their *coifs*, wheeled perambulators up and down, or took the children to the Punch and Judy shows. And on Sundays in the season, there were the races at Longchamps, with a drive homewards in the cool of the evening, through the Bois, where his cab was one of a long line of vehicles making a moving pageant of the human comedy, with laughing bourgeois families riding five and six in a cab, and aristocracy and opulent beauty, artificial and real, rolling by in victorias and electric broughams.

Those rides down the Avenue du Bois to the Arc de Triomphe made him feel very poor: the women, lolling back in silken comfort, seemed lifted above the everyday world, away from all thought of squalor and sordidness. They were the rare hot-house flowers of society; the cold wind of life's reality would wither them in a day. So they passed before him, exquisitely beautiful and remote, looking with languid interest at the rest of the people in the incomparable vanity of their silk and lace and diamonds. . . .

Yet again, his work took him behind the scenes of Parisian life, into places that are not familiar to the

casual visitor to Paris. He would sit in the Chamber of Deputies to make notes of an important debate, or to watch the rigid semicircle of French legislators break up into riotous factions, with the tintinnabulation of the President's bell adding to the din. This would appear in *The Day* with the head-line, "Pandemonium in the French Chamber." Perhaps it was necessary to interview a *juge d'instruction* in his private room at the Palais de Justice, or to pass through the corridors of the Surété—France's Scotland Yard—to inquire into a sensational murder mystery.

And he found, too, that in Paris he had a certain standing as a journalist that was denied him in London. He was registered in books, and the seal of approval was given to him in the shape of a *coupe-fil*, which was a card of identity, with his portrait and the name of *The Day* on it—a magic card that enabled him to do miraculous things with policemen and officials; it was a passport to the front row in the drama of life. There was no need in Paris to haggle with policemen, to wink at them, and win a passage through the crowd by subterfuge as in London: this card divided a way for him through the multitude.

So that now, when he felt that he had established himself in his career, when his salary was more than adequate for the needs of two, the strong need of Elizabeth came to him. The brilliant gaiety of Paris swirled about him, and tried to entice him into its joyous whirlpool. He knew the dangers that beset him: he knew the stories of men who had been dragged into the whirlpool, down into the waters that closed over their heads, bringing oblivion.

And he looked towards the ideal of Elizabeth, as he had always looked towards the ideal of the love which she personified, to save him from the evil things that are bred by loneliness and despair.

III

ONE Saturday night, when there was nothing else to do, he went up to Montmartre, and walked along the Boulevard de Clichy, past the grotesque absurdities of the *cabarets* that are set there for the delectation of foreign and provincial strangers: *cabarets* that mock at death and heaven and hell with all the vulgarity and coarseness that exists side by side with the love of beauty, art and culture in Paris.

For a franc you could watch the old illusion of a shrouded man turning to a grisly skeleton in his narrow coffin; or you could see a diverting burlesque of the celestial realms, and observe how sinners were burnt in a canvas hell with artificial flames. Humphrey had seen all these during his first week in Paris: he had laughed, but afterwards he had been ashamed of his laughter. They were a little degrading. . . .

He passed them by to-night, in spite of the enticing blandishments of the mock mute, the angel and the devil by the doors of their haunts. He wandered aimlessly along this Boulevard, where women crossed his path, looking very picturesque, without any covering to their heads, shawls across their shoulders and red aprons down to the fringe of their short skirts. There was something savage and primitive about these women: they lacked the frankness and gaiety of the coster-girl in London; they were beautiful, with an evil and cruel beauty. Vicious-looking men slouched from the shadows. Their looks could not conceal the knives in their pockets. They were as rats in the night, creeping from pavement to pavement, preying on humanity.

The door of a café chantant opened, as Humphrey came abreast with it, and the sound of a jingling chorus, played on a discordant piano, arrested his steps. The man who was coming out, thinking that Humphrey was about to enter, held the door open for him politely. Something impelled Humphrey forward.

He went inside.

The room was heavy with tobacco smoke; it floated in thin clouds about the lights and drifted here and there in pale spirals as it was blown from the lips of the smokers. His vision was blurred by the smoke at first, and, as he stood there blinking and self-conscious, it was as though he had intruded into some private and intimate gathering. It seemed that every one in the room was staring at him. The impression only lasted a moment. He perceived a vacant chair by a table and sat down, with the bearing of one to whom the place was familiar.

All around him the men and women were sitting. There was an air of sex-comradeship that, in spite of its frankness, was neither indecent nor blatant. The people were behaving in the most natural way in the world. Sometimes a woman nestled close to a man and their hands interlaced; sometimes a man sat with his arm round the waist of a girl. Mild liquids were before them—the light beer of France, little glasses of cherries soaked in brandy, glasses of white and red wine. Their eyes were set towards the small stage at the end of the room, a narrow platform framed in crudely-painted canvas, representing trees and foliage; while at the back there was a drop-scene that showed a forest as an early Japanese artist might have drawn it, with vast distances and a nursery contempt for perspective.

His eye wandered to the walls painted with scroll-work and deformed cupids and panels of nude women, so badly done that they appealed more to the sense of humour than to the sexual. The pictures on the walls

seemed to leave the men and women untouched; they concentrated all their attention on the entertainment. The only person in the place who showed any sign of boredom was the gendarme who sat by the door, the State's hostage to its conscience. Nothing, said the State, in effect, can be indecent if one of our gendarmes is there. This was not one of the *cabarets* where the poet-singers of Montmartre chant, with melancholy face, their witty doggerel or their fragrant pastorals; where people came to hear the veiled obscenities of political satire or allusions to passing events; this was a second-rate affair, a *tingel-tangel*—a species of family music-hall.

A waiter in an alpaca jacket, a stained apron wound skirt-wise round his trousers, approached Humphrey with an inquiring lift of his eyebrows. He removed empty glasses dexterously with one hand and slopped a cloth over the table with the other.

"M'sieu, desire . . .?"

"*Un fin*," answered Humphrey.

The waiter emitted an explosive *Bon* and threaded his way through the labyrinth of chairs to a high wooden counter, where a fat man, with his shirt-sleeves rolled back to his elbow, stood sentinel over rows of coloured bottles. The light shone on green and red liqueurs, on pale amber and dark brown bottles placed on glass shelves against a looking-glass background, that reflected the bullet shape of the *patron's* close-cropped head.

Meanwhile the pianist had finished his interlude, and there was a burst of applause as a woman appeared on the stage. She wore an amazing hat of orange and white silk, in which feathers were the most insistent feature. There was something extraordinarily bold and flaunting in her presence. Her neck and shoulders and bosom were bare to the low cut of her bodice, and the cruel light showed the powder that she had scattered over her throat

and shoulders to make them white and enticing; it showed the red paint on the lips and the rouge on the cheeks, and the black on her eyelashes and eyebrows. The crude touches of obvious artifice destroyed her beauty. Her waist was compressed into a painful smallness, and her skirt was flounced and reached only to the knees.

She sang a song that had something to do with a soldier's life. "Tell me, soldier," she sang, "what do you think of in battle? Do you think of the glory of the Fatherland and the splendour of dying for France?" And the soldier answers: "I think only of a farm in Avignon, and a maiden whose lips I used to kiss on the old bridge; I think only of my old mother and how she will embrace me when I come home."

When she sang the simple song, though her voice was false, and her gestures stereotyped, the rouge and the powder and the paint were forgotten for a moment. She was one of those unconscious artists belonging to a people who have art woven into the warp and woof of their daily life.

The audience took up the chorus. She nodded to them with an audacious smile. The pianist, with his cigarette stub hanging from his lips, under cover of the volume of voices, forsook the treble for a moment, and reached out with his hand for a glass of beer that rested above the piano.

It was the strange, fumbling motion of his hand that caught Humphrey's eye, trained to observe such details. He looked closer, and saw that the pianist's eyes were closed, and the lashes were withered where they met the cheek. He was blind; he never saw the faces and figures of the women who sang, he only heard the voices; he could see nothing that was harsh and cruel. And the picture of the blind pianist at the side of the garish stage, improvising little runs and trills and spinning

a web of melody night after night, stirred Humphrey with an odd emotion.

There was a pause. The door opened and closed as people came and went. Humphrey sipped at the brandy; the fiery taste of it made his palate and throat smart. The price of the entertainment was one franc, including a drink.

Suddenly the pianist struck up a well-known air. A slim girl, in the costume of the district, slouched on to the stage, her hands thrust into the pockets of her apron. Her hair was bundled together in careless heaps of yellow, her eyes were pale blue and almost almond-shaped, her features finely moulded, with a queer distinction of their own. And when she took one hand out of her apron pocket, he saw that the fingers were long and exquisitely tapered, and tipped with pink, beautiful nails that shone in the light. Those finger-nails betrayed her. They were not in keeping with the part.

She started singing, walking the small stage with a swaying motion of her body; her young form was lithe and graceful; her movements tigrine. And as she sang her lilting chorus, her pale eyes gazed from their narrow slits at Humphrey, not boldly or coquettishly, but with an indeterminate appeal, as though she felt ashamed of her song.

"Quand je danse avec mon grand frisé
Il a l'air de m'enlacer
Je perds la tête
'Suis comme une bête!
'Y a pas chose—'suis sa chose à lui
'Y a pas mal—Quoi? C'est mon mari
Car moi, je l'aime
J'aime mon grand frisé."

The audience sang the swinging chorus, and she moved sinuously to and fro with the rhythm of it. Humphrey sat there, and he seemed to lose consciousness

of all the other people in the room—the smell of the smoke, and the jingle of the piano, and the ill-painted pictures on the walls faded away from him; all his senses seemed to merge and concentrate on the enjoyment of this moment. She was singing on the stage for him, her narrow eyes never left him.

And her song was a pæan in praise of the brute in man.

She acted her song. Her face was radiant with the joy of being possessed, and her eyes shone as she abandoned herself to the words:

"Quand je danse avec le grand frisé
Il a l'air de m'enlacer. . . . "

Then her wonderful hands with their glinting fingernails went up to her head, and she half-closed her eyes, as though she were swooning:

"Je perds la tête . . ."

Now her eyes were opened, and they glared wildly, and her lips trembled, and her slim body quivered with animal hunger:

"'Suis comme une bête."

And now, she smiled, and pride was on her face; one hand rested on her hip, and she swaggered up the stage, as the words fitted into the opening lilt:

"'Y pas chose—suis sa chose à lui
'Y pas mal—Quoi? C'est mon mari . . ."

Her face became at once miraculously tender. She expressed great and overpowering love—a love so strong that it swept everything before it—a love that was without restraint, passionate, fierce and unquenchable. Her arms were outstretched. Her dark blouse, opened at the neck, revealed her white throat throbbing with her song:

"Car moi, je l'aime
J'aime mon grand frisé."

And when she sang "*Je l'aime*," she invested the words with passion and renunciation.

They clamoured for another verse, crying "*Bis . . . Bis*," in throaty tones, but she only came on to bow to them, and walk off again with that swaying stride.

"*Eh, bien!*" said a voice at Humphrey's elbow, "she is very good, our little Desirée, *hein?*"

He turned half round in his chair. At first he did not recognize the immaculately clothed young man, with the fair, long hair, who smiled at him, and then he recollected that they had met in the office of *Le Parisien*.

"M. Charnac, isn't it?" Humphrey asked. "I didn't know you at once. . . . Yes, she's very good. What's her name?"

"Desirée Lebeau," Charnac answered. He looked at Humphrey again, still smiling.

"Do you often come here?" he asked.

"This is the first time. . . . I was wandering about . . . I just dropped in."

Humphrey noticed that Charnac was not alone. A pretty girl dressed becomingly in black, with a touch of red about her neck, sat by his side.

"Allow me to present a friend, Margot," Charnac said to the girl. "He is an Englishman—a journalist," he added. And to Humphrey he said:

"Mlle. Margot Lebeau. She is the sister of our little Desirée."

"*M'sieu est Anglais*," said the dark-haired girl in a piping voice. "*Ah! que ça doit être interessant d'être Anglais.*"

IV

THE entertainment was near its end. A dainty figure came from the heavy curtains that hung from each side of the proscenium and hid the entertainers from the audience. Humphrey recognised Desirée, though she had forsaken her stage-costume and wore a simple dark-blue dress, with a black fur boa held carelessly about her shoulders. She came towards them with a smile, stopping on the way, as one or two men, of a better class than the bulk of the audience, hailed her. She bent down to them, and whispered conversations followed. She laughed and slapped the face of one man—an elderly man with a red ribbon in his button-hole. It was a playful slap, just the movement that a kitten makes with its paw when it is playing with long hanging curtains.

Charnac pushed out a chair for her invitingly. She came to them with a smile hovering about her lips, and a look of curious interest in her pale eyes as she saw Humphrey. She shook hands with Charnac, and kissed her sister Margot, and then, with a frank gesture, without any embarrassment, she held out her hand to Humphrey and said:

"*Bon soir, p'tit homme.*"

There was a quality of friendship in her voice; her whole manner suggested a desire to be amiable; she accepted Humphrey as a friend without question, and, as for Charnac, she treated him as if he were one of the family, as a brother. The women in the room stared at the party every few moments, absorbed in the details of Desirée's dress, and the men glanced at her with smiles that irritated Humphrey.

"It is a little friend of mine — an Englishman," Charnac said to Desirée.

"An Englishman!" said Desirée, in a way that seemed to be the echo of her sister's remark a few minutes earlier. "I have a friend in England." She spoke French in a clipped manner, abbreviating her words, and scattering fragments of slang through her phrases.

"Is that so?" Humphrey said. "What part of England?"

"Manchestaire," she replied. "His name was Mr Smith. You know him?"

Humphrey laughed. "I'm afraid I don't—Manchester's a big place, you know."

"Is it as big as London?"

"Oh no. Not as big as London?"

"I should like to go to London. I have a friend there—a girl friend."

"Oh! where does she live?"

"I forget the name of the street—somewhere near Charing Cross—that's a railway station, isn't it?"

"Yes."

Silence fell between them while a comedian, dressed as a comic soldier, sang a song that made them all laugh; though Humphrey could not understand the *argot*, he caught something of the innuendo of the song. Strange, that in France and Germany, in countries where patriotism and militarism are at their highest, the army should be held up to ridicule, and burlesqued in the coarsest fashion. The song gave Humphrey an opportunity of studying Desirée's face. He saw that the yellow hair was silky and natural; her eyebrows were as pale as her hair, and when she laughed, her red lips parted to show small white teeth that looked incredibly sharp. She was not beautiful, but she held some mysterious attraction for him. She was of a type that

differed from all the women he had met. Though her face and figure showed that she was little more than twenty, her bearing was that of a woman who had lived and learnt all there was to know of the world. One slim, ungloved hand rested on the table, and he noted the beauty of it, its slender, delicate fingers, and the perfect shape of her pink, shining nails. In the making of her, Nature seemed to have concentrated in her hands all her power of creating beauty.

The song finished to a round of applause.

"*Il est joliment drôle*," said Desirée to Charnac. "Ah! zut . . . I could do with a drink."

"We won't have anything here," Charnac said. "They only sell species of poisons. Let's go and have supper at the Chariot d'Or. . . . Will you join us, Mr Quain?"

Why not? It was a perfectly harmless idea. Every experience added something to his knowledge. And yet, he hesitated. Somewhere, at the back of his mind, a feeling of uneasiness awoke in him. Charnac would pair off with Margot, and he would have to sit with Desirée during the meal. The thought carried with it a picture of forbidden things. Conscience argued with him: "You really oughtn't to, you know." "Why not? What harm will it do?" he urged. Conscience was relentless. "You forget you have a duty to some one." "Nonsense," he said, "let's look at the thing in a broad-minded way. I won't hurt me to have supper with them, surely."

Desirée laid a hand upon his sleeve gently.

"*Tu viens—oui*," she asked, in a low, caressing voice. Their eyes met. He saw the pupils of her narrow eyes grow larger for a second, as though they were striving to express unspoken thoughts. Then they receded and contracted to little, dark, twinkling beads set in their centre of pale blue circles.

"*Oui*," he said, with a sigh.

They came out into the noisy night of the Boulevard. They walked together, Charnac and Margot with linked arms. The lower floors of the night restaurants were blazing with light, but in the upper rooms the drawn blinds subdued the glare, and transformed it into a warm glow. Cabs and motor-cars came up the steep hill from the Grands Boulevards below for the revelry of supper after the theatre. The great doors of the Chariot d'Or were continually moving, and the uniformed doorkeeper seemed to enjoy the exercise of pulling the door open every second, as women in wraps, accompanied by men, crossed the threshold.

They went upstairs into a long brilliant room, all gold and glass and red plush, with white tablecloths shining in the strong light. In the corner a group of musicians, dressed in a picturesque costume—it might have been taken from any of the Balkan States, or from imagination—played a dragging waltz melody.

A dark woman sat by them, wearing a Spanish dress, orange and spangled, the bodice low-cut, and the skirt fanciful and short, showing her thin legs clad in black open-work stockings. She regarded the room with an air of detached interest, unanswering the glances of the men. She was the wife of the first violinist.

Charnac led the way to a table; he placed himself next to Margot on the red plush sofa-cushions, and Humphrey sat with Desirée. While Charnac was ordering the supper and consulting their individual tastes, Humphrey glanced round the room at the men who sat at the little tables with glasses of sparkling amber wine before them, some of them in evening-dress, with crumpled, soft shirt-fronts, others in lounge suits or morning-coats. Not all had women with them, but the women that he saw were luxurious,

beautiful creatures, with indolent eyes and faces of strange beauty.

The lights gleamed under rose-coloured shades on the table, on the silver dishes piled high with splendid fruits, on bottles swathed tenderly with napkins, set in silver ice-pails, on tumblers of coloured wines and liqueurs.

"It's pretty here, eh?" said Desirée.

"It's not so bad. I've never been here before. Do you come often?"

"Oh no! not often: only when Margot brings Gustave to come and fetch me after I've been singing."

She clapped her hands gaily as the waiter set a steaming dish of mussels before them. The house was famed for its *moules marinières*. "I adore them," she said, unfolding her serviette, and tucking it under her chin. Charnac ladled out the mussels into soup-plates. Their blue iridescent shells shone in an opal-coloured gravy where tiny slices of onion floated on the surface. Her dainty fingers dipped into the plate, and she fed herself with the mussels, biting them from the shells with her sharp white teeth. She ate with an extraordinary rapidity, breaking off generous pieces from the long, crisp roll of bread before her, and drinking deeply of her red Burgundy.

She was simply an animal. Margot ate in much the same way, with greedy, quick gestures, until her plate was piled high with empty mussel shells. And, during the meal, they chattered trivialities, discussing personal friends in a slangy, intimate phaseology.

The sharp taste of the sauce, with its flavour of the salt sea-water, made Humphrey thirsty, and he, too, drank plenty of wine; and the wine and the warmth sent the colour rushing to his cheeks, and filled him with a sense of comfort. The whole atmosphere of the place had a soothing effect on him.

The orchestra started to play a Spanish dance, and the woman in orange rose from her seat, and tossing her lace shawl aside, moved down the aisle of tables in a sidling, swinging dance, castanets clicking from her thumbs, marking the sway and poise of her body above her hips. It was a sexual, voluptuous dance, that stirred the senses like strong wine. Now she flung herself backwards with a proud, uplifted chin. One high-heeled satin shoe stamped the floor. Her eyes flashed darkly and dangerously; she flaunted her bare throat and bosom before them; now she moved with a lithe sinuous motion from table to table, one hand on her hip, and the other swinging loosely by her side.

There was something terrible and triumphant in her dance to the beat of the music with its rhythm of a heart throbbing in passion.

"Bravo! bravo!" they cried, as the dance finished. "*Bis*," shouted Charnac, lolling back in his seat with his arm round Margot's shoulder.

"She dances well," said Humphrey.

Desirée turned her pale eyes on him. "I can dance better," she said, and before he had realized it, she was up and in the centre of the room, and everybody laughed and clapped hands, as Desirée began to dance with stealthy, cat-like steps. Her face was impudent, as she twined and twisted her thin body into contortions that set all the men leering at her. It was frankly repulsive and horrible to Humphrey; she seemed suddenly to have ceased to be a woman, just as when she had started to eat. She was inhuman when she sang and ate and danced.

The blur of white flesh through the smoke, the odour of heavy scents, and the sight of Desirée writhing in her horrid dance, sickened him. He saw her white teeth gleaming between her lips, half-parted with the exhaustion of her dance, he saw her eyes laughing at him,

as though she were proud and expected his applause, and he felt a profound, inexplicable pity for her that overwhelmed his disgust.

She flung herself, panting, into her seat, and pushed back her disordered yellow hair with her hands. "*Oh la! . . . la!*" she cried, laughing in gasps, "*c'est fatiguant, ça . . .* my throat is like a furnace." And she clicked her glass against the glass that Humphrey held in his hand, and drained it to the finish.

"Why did you do that?" asked Humphrey, huskily.

"Do what?"

"Dance like that—in front of all these people?"

"Why shouldn't I, if I want to?"

"I don't like it," he said, wondering why he was impelled to say so.

"Well, you shouldn't have said she dances well," Desirée replied.

"I must be going," Humphrey said.

"Oh, not yet," Charnac said. "Let's all go together."

"No," he pushed his chair away with sudden resolution. "I must go."

"But, my dear—" Desirée began.

"I must go," Humphrey repeated, slowly. It was like the repetition of a lesson. "I must go now."

"Oh, well—" Charnac said.

The waiter appeared with a bill. "You will allow me to pay?" Humphrey asked Charnac.

"*Mais non, mais non, mon ami,*" he replied, good-naturedly. "It was I who asked you to come, wasn't it? Another night it will be your turn."

"Another night," echoed Margot, in her high-pitched voice. "*J'adore les Anglais, ils sont si gentils.*"

"And why cannot you stop?" Desirée asked.

He avoided her eyes. Never could he explain in this room, with its scent and its music and its warmth,

that turned vice into happiness and made virtue as chilling and intractable as marble. He only knew that he had to go. He made some excuse—any excuse—work—a headache . . . he did not know what he was saying; he was only conscious of those narrow eyes beneath pale eyebrows, and red parted lips, and the soft hand that lay in his—the soft hand with the finger-tips as beautiful as rosy sea-shells.

They were not to blame; they could not be expected to know his innermost life, nor why it was that he felt suddenly as if he had profaned himself, and all that was most sacred to him. But that finer, nobler self that was always dormant within him, as eager to awaken to influences as it was to be lulled to sleep by them, became active and alert. . . .

There was a hint of dawn in the sky as he came out into the empty street, his mind charged with a deep melancholy. But, as the cool air played about his face, he breathed more freely after the stuffy warmth of the room, and he walked with a firm step, square-shouldered, erect and courageous.

V

SOME weeks later there came a letter which brought the reality of things into his own life. It was a short and regretful letter from a firm of Easterham solicitors, announcing the death of his aunt.

They informed him of the fact in a few, brief, dignified words. There was an undercurrent of excuse, as if they felt themselves personally responsible for the sudden demise, and were anxious to apologise for any inconvenience that might be felt by Mr Quain. He gathered that his aunt had lived on an annuity, which expired with her; that a little financial trouble—loans to a brother of whom Humphrey had never heard—absorbed her furniture and all her possessions, with the exception of a watch and chain, which she had willed to Humphrey. The funeral was to take place two days hence—and that was all.

The letter moved him neither to tears nor sorrow. His aunt had been as remote from him in life as she was in death. An unbridgeable abyss had divided them. Never, during the years he had lived in Easterham, after his father's death, had they talked of the fundamental things that mattered to one another. He felt that he owed her nothing, least of all love, for she remained in his memory a masterful, powerful influence, trying to fetter him down to a narrow life, without comprehension of the broad, beautiful world that lay at her doors.

He could see her now in her dress of some mysterious black pattern, and always a shawl over her shoulder, her white hair plastered close to her heavy gold earrings, her lips thin and compressed, and her eyes hard-set, when

she said, "You must Get On." She did not know, when she urged him to go forward, how far he meant to go. Her vision of Getting On was bounded by Easterham —what could she know and understand of all the bewildering phases he had undergone; the bitter heart-aches, the misery of failure, and the glory of conquest in a world wider than a million Easterhams.

But, as he thought of her dead, a strange feeling came to him that now she could understand everything, that she knew all, and was even ready to reach out in sympathy to him. Her last pathetic message—a watch and chain! The rude knowledge that he had gained of the secret things of her life—how she lived, her loan to the brother; it seemed that some hidden door which they had both kept carefully locked had been flung open widely—that his eyes were desecrating her profoundest secrets.

It was not the first time that Death had stirred his life, but this was a sudden and unexpected snapping of a chain that bound him with his boyhood. Always he had been subconsciously aware of his aunt's presence in the scheme of things; there had been ingrained in him a certain fear of her, that he had never quite shaken off. Behind the individuality of his own life she had lurked, a shadowy figure, yet ready to emerge from the shadows at a moment of provocation, and become real and distinct and forbidding.

And now he could scarcely realize that she was dead—that he was absolutely alone in the world, though there might be, somewhere, cousins and kinspeople whom he had never seen.

She had not been demonstratively kind to him in life. The watch and chain she left was the first present he could ever remember receiving from her. But he felt that he could not absent himself from her funeral; it would be a sad and desolate business in the Easterham

churchyard, with not many people there, yet he knew that he could not pass the day in Paris without thinking of her, lowered into the grave to the eternal loneliness of death.

He sent a telegram to London, and received a reply a few hours later, giving him permission to leave Paris, and the next day he travelled to England.

The collection of papers and magazines rested unread in his lap. He looked from the window on the succession of pictures that flashed and disappeared—a blue-bloused labourer at work in the fields, or a waggoner toiling along a country lane; children shouting by the hedgerows, and the signal-women who sat by their little huts on the railway as the train sped by. He could not read; sometimes, with a sigh, he sought a paper (France had just caught the popular magazine habit from England), turned the pages restlessly, and, finally, leaning on the arm-rest, stared out of the window. . . .

The shuttle of his mind went to and fro, twining together the disconnected threads of his thoughts into a pattern of memories—memories of his youth and his work and his aunt interwoven with the strong, dominating thought of Elizabeth. . . .

His thoughts turned continually to Elizabeth; sometimes they spun away to something else, but always they were led back through a series of memories to that night when he had kissed her for the first time.

It was odd how this absence from her seemed to have changed her in his mind. There had been an undercurrent of disappointment in their relations, of late. Her letters had been strangely sterile and unsatisfying. She had written an evasive reply, after a delay, an answer to his last letter begging her to come to him. . . .

Yet he was eager to see her and to kiss her. He felt that she was all that he had left to him in

the world: that she and his work were all that mattered. . . .

A garrulous Frenchman lured him into conversation during dinner; he was glad, for it gave him relief from the monotonous burden of his thoughts . . . and on the boat he dozed in the sunshine of a smooth crossing.

Once in England again, the delight of an exile returning to his home provided new sensations. The porters were deferentially solicitous for his comfort; the Customs officers behaved with innate politeness, and the little squat train, with its separate compartments, brought a glow of happiness to him. He saw England as a stranger might see it for the first time: he observed the discipline and order of the railway station that came not from oppression but from high organization and planning. There were no mistakes made; the boy brought his tea-basket and did not overcharge him; the porter accepted sixpence and touched his hat, not obsequiously, but in acknowledgment, without a suggestion of haggling for more. It seemed incredible that he should find this perfection, where a year ago he could not see it. . . .

There were Frenchmen in the carriage, and he sat with the conscious pride of an Englishman in his own country. The train moved out, giving a glimpse of the harbour and the sea breaking in white lines over the sloping beach; and then through a tunnel that emerged on fields. The first thing he noticed was the vivid green of the country, and the way it was cut up and divided into squares and oblongs: the small clumps of low-set trees, the fat cattle, and the peace brooding over the land. And then he noticed the little houses, low-storied and thatched, with a feather of blue smoke waving from their chimneys. The whole journey was a series of new impressions that elated him. Stations flashed and left behind a blurred memory of advertise-

ments, and names that breathed of yeoman England: Ashford—Paddock Wood—Sevenoaks—Knockholt; and then the advertisement-boards stood out of the green fields, blatantly insisting on lung tonics and pills, marking off mile after mile that brought him nearer to London. The houses closed in on the railway line; the train ran now through larger stations of red brick, passing the peopled platforms with an echoing roar; other crowded trains passed them, going slowly to the suburbs they had left behind. A new note seemed to come into the journey as the evening descended, and the world outside was populous with lights.

The memory of the clean, sweet country, with its toy houses, was wiped away by a swift blot of darkness as the train flashed through New Cross, and out into the broad network of rails with which London begins.

He saw the factories and the sidings and the busy traffic of trains overtaking one another, running parallel for a space, and then swaying apart as one branched off to the south-eastern suburbs. He saw the smoke hanging in thick clouds on the far horizon; masts and rigging made spidery silhouettes against the sky; and the tall, factory chimneys thrust out their monstrous tongues of livid fire.

The city was before him right and left, overgrown and tremendous. They ran level with crooked chimney-pots and the scarred roofs of endless rows of houses. The upper windows were yellow with light, and he caught glimpses of women before mirrors and men in their shirt-sleeves. Dark masses of clouds rolled before the moon. Something wet splashed on his cheek.

A silent Englishman sitting next to him, said moodily: "Raining as usual. I've never once come home without it raining." He laughed as though it were a bitter joke.

Fantastic reflections wriggled on the wet, shining

approach to London Bridge—a swift vision of bus-drivers, with oilcloth capes glinting in the rain, hurrying crowds, and something altogether new—a motor-omnibus.

Then the train, with a dignified, steady movement, swung slowly across Hungerford Bridge, and he saw the strong, resolute river, black and broad, flowing to the bridges, within the jewelled girdle of the Embankment.

The sense of England's greatness came to him, as the landmarks of London were set in a semicircle before him: the tall dome of St Paul's, the spires of churches, the turrets of great hotels, grey Government offices, culminating in the vague majesty of the Houses of Parliament.

How different the streets were from Paris! There was a force and an energy that seemed to be driving everything perpetually forward. This business of getting to dinner—it was about half-past seven—was a terribly earnest and crowded affair. The throng of motor-cars and omnibuses jammed and flocked together in the Strand, held in leash by a policeman's uplifted hand, and when it was released, it crawled sluggishly forward. Here and there, rare sight for Humphrey, one of the new motor-omnibuses lumbered forward heavily, threatening instant annihilation of everything. There was no chatter of voices in the crowd—no gesticulation—the people walked silently and hurriedly with a set concentration of purpose.

He went to a hotel in the Adelphi to leave his bag. Then he came out, pausing for a moment irresolutely in the crowd. It was too late, as he had foreseen, to go to Elizabeth. He had made up his mind to see her on his return from Easterham.

An omnibus halted by him: he boarded it, and as he passed the Griffin, he breathed deeply like a monarch entering his own domain, for the scent of the Street was in his nostrils, and the old, well-known vision of the lit

windows passed before him, and a newsboy ran along shouting a late edition. This was the only Street in the world, he felt, that he loved; its people were his people, and its life was his life.

He turned into the Pen Club, to friendship, good-fellowship and welcome. And all the old friends were there—Larkin, retelling old stories, Chander spinning merry yarns, and Vernham making melancholy epigrams. Willoughby, he learnt, was away on a mystery in the north, and Jamieson was at a first night.

"By the way," said Larkin, "heard about Tommy Pride?"

"No. What's happened?"

"He's left *The Day*."

"Sacked?" asked Humphrey.

Larkin nodded. "Rather rough on poor old Tommy. Married, isn't he?"

A picture of his first visit to the home of the Prides leapt before Humphrey's eyes, and the comfort, the cheeriness, that hid all the hard work of the week. The news hurt him queerly.

"What's he doing?" he asked.

"Well, not much. Tommy's not a youngster, you know. I suppose the Newspaper Press Fund will tide him over a bit."

Larkin dropped the subject, to listen to a story from Vernham. After all, it was the most casual thing in the happenings of Fleet Street to them: it might happen to them any day; it was bound to happen to them one day. And there would always be young men ready to take their places. Nobody was to blame; it was just one of the chances of the inexorable system which made their work a gamble, where men hazarded their wits and their lives, and lost or won in the game.

Humphrey knew more than they did what it meant for Tommy Pride. He heard as a mocking echo now,

the old cry, "Two pounds a week and a cottage in the country." . . .

"Have a drink," Larkin said.

He became suddenly out of tune with the place. His perception of Fleet Street altered. He saw the relentless cruelty of it, the implacable demand for sacrifice that it always made. He visioned it as a giant striding discordantly through the lives of men, crushing them with a strength as mighty as its own machines that roared in the night . . . a clumsy and senseless giant, that towered above them, against whom all struggles were pitiful . . . futile.

VI

"ONE lump or two?" asked Elizabeth, holding the sugar-tongs poised over his cup of tea.

"One, please," said Humphrey.

"Milk or cream?"

"Milk."

She handed him the cup in silence. There was something in the frank, questioning look in her blue eyes that made him avert his gaze. Their meeting had not been at all as he had imagined it. He did not spring towards her, boyishly, and take her in his arms and kiss her. He had approached her humbly and timidly when she stood before him, in all her white purity and beauty, and their lips had met in a brief kiss of greeting. Her manner had been curiously formal and restrained, empty of all outward display of emotion.

And now they sat at tea in her room with the conversation lagging between them. As he looked round at the room with its chintzes and rose-bowls, its old restfulness reasserted itself. But to Humphrey it seemed now more than restful—it seemed stagnant and out of the world. . . . Somewhere, in Paris, there were music and laughter, but here, in this quiet backwater of London, one's vision became narrow, and life seemed a monotonous repetition of days. He felt moody, depressed; a sense of coming disaster hung over his mind, like a shadow. Her quick sympathy perceived his gloom.

"You ought not to have gone," she said, softly.

"You mean to the funeral?"

"Yes; you are too susceptible . . . too easily in-

fluenced by surroundings. There was no need to come all this way to make yourself miserable."

"I don't know why I went," he said. "We never had much in common, my aunt and I, but somehow . . . I don't know . . . I couldn't bear the thought of not being present at her funeral. I had a silly sort of idea that she would know if I were not there."

"You are too susceptible," she repeated. "Sometimes I wish you were stronger. You are too much afraid of what people will think of you. This death has meant nothing at all to you, but you are ashamed to say so."

"It has meant something to me," he said. "I don't mean that I felt a wrench, as if some one whom I loved very dearly had gone . . . I felt that when my father died . . . but her death has changed me somehow—here—" and he tapped his breast, "I feel older. I feel as if I had stood over the grave and seen the burial of my youth."

"It has made you gloomy," Elizabeth said. "I think you would have been truer to yourself if you had remained in Paris."

He reflected for a few moments, drinking his tea. He felt sombre enough in his black clothes and black tie—dreary concessions to conventionality.

"Ah, but I wanted to see you, Elizabeth," he said earnestly. "It's terribly lonely without you."

She leaned forward and laid her hand lightly on his, with a soft, caressing touch. "It's good of you to say that," she said, and then, with a frank smile, "tell me, Humphrey, do you really miss me very much?"

"I do," he said; and he began talking of himself and all that he did in Paris. Elizabeth listened with an amused smile playing about her lips. He told her of his work and his play, growing enthusiastic over Paris, speaking with all the self-centredness of the egotist.

"It seems very pleasant," she said. "You are to be envied, I think. You ought to be very happy: doing everything that you want to do; occupying a good position in journalism."

He purred mentally under her praise. Already he felt better; her presence stimulated him; but he could not see, nor understand, the true Elizabeth, for the mists of vanity, ambition and selfishness clouded his vision at that moment. If only he had forgotten himself . . . if only he had asked her one question about herself and *her* work, or shown the smallest interest in anything outside his own career, he might have risen to great heights of happiness.

This was the second in which everything hung in the balance. He saw Elizabeth lean her chin in the palm of her hand and contemplate reflectively the distance beyond him. He marked the beauty of her lower arm, bare to the rounded charm of the elbow, as it rested on the curve of the arm-chair. So, he thought, would she sit in Paris, and grace his life.

And then, suddenly, her face became grave, and she said, abruptly:

"Humphrey, I want to talk to you very seriously. I want to know whether you will give up journalism."

He remembered her hint of this far back in the months when she had first allowed him to tell her of his love. He had thought the danger was past, but now she came to him, with a deliberate, frontal attack on the very stronghold of his existence.

"Give up journalism!" he echoed. "What for?"

All the weapons of her sex were at her command. She might have said, "For me"; she might have smiled and enticed and cajoled. But she brushed these weapons aside disdainfully. Hers was the earnest business of putting Humphrey to the test.

"Because I think you and I will never be happy together if you do not. Because, if I marry you (he noticed she did not say, 'When I marry you'), I should not want your work to occupy a larger place in our lives than myself. Because I hate your work, and I think you can do better things. Those are my reasons."

He stood up and walked to the window, looking out on the trees that made an avenue of the quiet road. A man with a green baize covered tray on his head came round the corner, swinging a bell up and down.

"Well?" she said.

"Oh but look here, Elizabeth," he began, "you spring something like this on me suddenly, and expect me to answer at once . . ."

"Oh, no! you can have time to think it over. You've had nearly a year, you know."

"How do you make that out?"

"Have you forgotten? When you were going to Paris—before you were going to Paris even—I tried to show you that I wanted you to give up the work. I remember you promised things. You said you'd write books, or do essays for the weeklies . . ."

"But, dear, you can't make a living writing books—unless you fluke, or unless you're a genius; as for essays for the weeklies, frankly, I don't believe I can do them—I'm not brilliant enough."

"Yes, you are," Elizabeth urged. (Fatal mistake to make, it smoothed all his vanity the right way.) "I believe in you, Humphrey. If I didn't believe in you, I wouldn't be talking as I am now. And, besides, I've told you before, I have enough for us both."

Though she was offering him freedom; though, if he wished, he could accept her offer and be rid for ever from the torments of Fleet Street, he could not leave its joys.

"You don't understand," he said. "You couldn't expect me to live on you. . . ."

"Why not? I should be prepared to live on you, if I were poor."

"That's different. You're a woman."

She laughed. "We won't go into the side-issues of arguments over ethics," she said. "You need not live on me. You told me that you had saved four hundred pounds. If we lived simply that would keep us both for a start, and you could be adding to your income by writing. Humphrey, don't you see I'm trying to rescue you. I want you to do something fine and noble; I want you to go forward."

"Well, I've gone forward," he said. "I've made myself in the Street. You don't know what you ask when you want me to give it up. Nobody can understand it unless he's been in the game. I can't think what it is—it isn't vanity, because all that we write is unsigned; it's sheer love of the work that drives us on."

"But you hate it, too."

"We hate it as fiercely as we love it . . ." he said, simply. "One day we say to ourselves, 'We will give it up.' That's what I say to you, now. I'm going to give it up, one day."

"That you have also promised before," she said, in a gentle voice. "Let us talk it over between ourselves. Why shouldn't you leave now?"

He was cornered: he stood at bay, facing her beauty, but behind it and above it he saw all the struggles and endeavour and splendid triumph that awaited him in the restless years to come, when each day would be a battle-field, and any might bring him defeat or conquest. He saw the world opening before him, and far-off cities close at hand; he saw himself wandering through the years, touching the lives of men; a privileged person, always behind the scenes of life, with a hint of power

perhaps. . . . And, in exchange, she offered him peace and rest, both of which corroded the soul eager for war; peace and rest and love, that would be so beautiful until the years made them familiar and wearisome, until he would be forced to go out again into the thick of the battle . . . and by that time his armour would be rusty, and the years of peace would have blunted his sword.

"Elizabeth," he said slowly, "I can't live in a room, now. I can't always look out of the window on the same scene. I must keep moving. Each day must bring me a fresh scene, a fresh experience. I have grown so used to change and movement that a week without it makes life dull and unbearable. I'm not fit for anything else but the work I do. I'm born to do that and nothing else. Everything in life now I see from the point of view of 'copy.'" He laughed, but there was a sob in his laughter at his shameful confession. "Why, even at the funeral, as I stood over the grave, and watched them lower the coffin, I felt that I could write a splendid column about it, and instead of feeling the solemnity of it all, I found that I was watching the white surplices against the green trees, and looking at the faces of the people, and painting a picture in my mind. . . ."

He paused. Her eyes were downcast, and her fingers played absently with the loops of the chain that hung from her neck.

"It's a habit," he went on. "It's grown on me, so that I see life and its emotions as a series of things to be written about. Why shouldn't I have thought as I did at the funeral? I have been taught to do it, when I go to the funerals of great men that I have to report. I'm a journalist . . . a reporter. I've seen men eat their hearts out in a year, after they've left the Street light-heartedly. The reaction comes suddenly. Things are happening all around them, and they're out of it. And they creep back, and try to get a job again. That's

what Kenneth himself will do one day . . . I don't want to be one of those, Elizabeth. I want to go through with it, right through to the failure at the end of all, and when the failure comes, I'll build up again."

She spread out her hands helplessly. "I see . . ." she said, "I see. . . ." That was all for a moment, and then, again: "If you were doing something worthy, I could understand; if you were producing art, I could understand, too . . . but this"—a copy of *The Day* was on the table, and she held it in her hand—"this is unworthy. This is all you produce with your infinite labour."

"It's not unworthy . . . we have our ideals."

She laughed, and her laugh stung him.

"Humphrey, you have the ha'penny mind that does not see beyond its own nose. You just live for the day itself. Oh!" she cried, "if you knew how I hate your Ferrol, and all that he stands for: all the ignoble things in life, painting everything with the commercial taint of worldly success. There was a beautiful picture bought the other day for the National Gallery. I see it is to be known as the '£60,000 picture.' That's the spirit behind Ferrol . . . we might be crying for great reforms—I have not spoken of my work in all this—we might be lifted up with the power at his command . . ."

When she spoke of Ferrol, Humphrey remembered all that had been done for him. What could she know of Ferrol's personality, of his splendid force, of the thousand generous acts that remained hidden, while only the things were remembered that blackened his reputation. His admiration for Ferrol was immeasurable. He saw in the indomitable energy of the man something tangible and positive among all the negative virtues of life. Ferrol stood for achievement that crowned the indefatigable years. And with it all, this superman could

descend from his loftiness and be human and weave the spell of his humanity about the lives of others.

"You don't understand Ferrol," he said. "Very few people do. But he has been kind to me . . . there's something in Ferrol that draws me to him. One day you will see he will do all that you expect him to do, but the time is not yet ripe for that. And you speak as if Ferrol were the only man in England who owned a newspaper. What of the others—have any of them done as much good as he has done?"

"Whatever good he has done, is done from motives of gain."

"I do not look at motives," he retorted. "I look only at the effects of the action. If a bad deed is done from good motives, it does not make the deed anything but bad."

They were standing face to face now.

"Come, Elizabeth," he said, moving towards her. "You do not know how I love you, and if you loved me, you would not ask me to give up my work."

Her face was white and beautiful, and her hand went up to her heart with a womanly gesture. She spoke in a low, deliberate voice.

"In all that we have said, there has never been a word of what giving up *my* work may mean to me. Yet you would have me abandon it, and forsake all the good we have tried to build up. . . ."

"You would have to give it up, one day, Elizabeth. Besides, if you like," he said, desperately, "I'll go to Ferrol and ask him to remove me from Paris back to London. I'll do anything to meet you, I only want to make you happy."

"Oh, don't keep on saying that sort of thing," she said; "it irritates me. Those hollow repetitions of set phrases—just because they're the right thing to say."

"I think you are unreasonable," he began. "I have

worked all these years for success, and now, just when I've won it, you wish me to throw everything away."

"I wish you to do nothing against your will. I thought you would have seen my point of view. I thought you would be ready to share in my work, which is the work of humanity . . . I am sorry. You see, we clash. We shall be better alone."

He stared at her with dull incomprehension. "We clash. We shall be better alone." The words repeated themselves over and over again in his brain. And his mind suddenly went back to a little room in the Strand and the tears of Lilian. . . .

"You mean that," he said, slowly. "You mean that."

She nodded. "Don't you see how impossible it would be?"

"You never loved me," he flung forth as a challenge. "You could have helped me and understood me. . . . I am not so bad as you think I am."

A sad smile answered him. "I understand you so well, Humphrey, that I know I shall never be able to help you."

He looked about him in weak hesitation. "I suppose I must begin again," he said.

"You . . . you . . . all the time it is you," she cried, passionately. "And what about myself; must not I begin over again, too?"

"I'm sorry," he said, feeling the inadequacy of his words. He longed intensely to be away from her now, to be out in the open street where he could think. This room was stifling. He went through the horrid methodical business of parting as if it were all a dream. He remembered glancing at the clock in a casual way, and saying, "I'd better be going"; he remembered the ludicrous search for one glove, he murmuring that it

didn't really matter, and she insisting on a search with aching minuteness. . . .

He never saw her again; her life had impinged on his, and left its impression, as many others had done. He did not regret her as he had regretted Lilian, for she had outraged his self-respect, and left him abashed and humbled.

VII

HE went back to Paris, and a week later the trouble broke out in Narbonne.

At first it did not seem very serious. One understood vaguely that the wine-growers were in revolt. The Paris buyers had been adulterating the vintages—making one cask into a dozen—so that they came to a year when there was such a glut of this adulterated wine on the market, that the wine-growers of the South were left with wine to spill in the gutters, and wine to give to the pigs —but without bread to give to their children.

Then there arose one of those men who flame into history for a few vivid moments. A leader of men, whose words were sparks dropped among straw; who had but to say "Kill," and they would kill, until he bade them stop.

For a time, in a way essentially peculiar to France, the ludicrous prevailed. Municipalities resigned, mayors and all, and there was no giving nor taking in marriage, no registration of births or deaths. Odd stories of the despair of love—sick peasantry at postponed weddings—filled the papers; the *Assiette au Beurre* published a special number satirizing the situation. It was a good joke in Paris—but at Perpignan and Montpellier twenty thousand *vignerons* were talking of bloody revolution, and marching with blue and silver banners, and calling on the Government to put a tax on sugar, so as to make adulteration so costly that it should be profitless. . . .

And Humphrey in the Paris office distilled a column a day from the forty columns that the French Special Correspondents sent to their papers, while Dagneau, up

at the Ministry of the Interior, garnered facts and official *communiqués*.

Work was his salvation and his solace. Everything of the past was wiped away from his mind when Humphrey worked. The personal things affecting his own private life became trivial beside the urgent importance of keeping *The Day* well-informed. And thus habit had fortified his power of resistance to external matters that might have disturbed a mind less trained to make itself subservient to the larger issue of duty. In a week—a brief week—he had gone through every phase of sorrow, anger, self-pity at his rejection. He thought of writing—indeed, he went so far one night as to compose a letter imploring Elizabeth for forgiveness, promising everything she wished . . . but, when it was written, he tore it into little pieces. A mood of futile oaths followed. He felt that he had been balked of her by trickery. It led to violent hatred of her cold austerity, her icy splendour. He put away the thought of her from him. After all, what did it matter? They would never have been happy together. Always she was above him, distant and unattainable . . . yet those fine moments, when she had stooped down and lifted him up, when gold and brilliance took the place of the dross in his mind! How she filled him with dreams of overwhelming possibilities, of ennobling achievements. . . . Below the crust of the selfishness and vanity of his life, there was a rich vein of good and strong desire ready to be worked, if she had only known. There were moments when his whole soul ached with an intense longing to be exalted and free from the impoverished squalor of its surroundings. He knew it, and the thought of it made him unjust to Elizabeth. She had not known of those constant conflicts which endured over years that seemed everlasting,—a guerrilla warfare with conscience.

They had not mattered. She had given his soul back to him, to do as he liked with it; she had forsaken him before he was strong enough to stand alone. . . .

The telephone bell rang. He adjusted the metal band over his head. "Londres," said the voice of the operator. His ears heard nothing but the voice of *The Day* calling to him; his eyes saw nothing but the sheets of writing at his side, and everything else faded from his mind but the news of the night. . . .

He put the receiver down, and almost immediately the telephone bell rang, and he heard a voice telling him that it was Charnac. . . . "Where have you been?" asked Charnac. "One has missed you." Humphrey explained his absence.

"Can you come to supper to-night," Charnac called. "Your little Desirée will be there." His voice came out of the depths of space, calling Humphrey to the gaiety of life. "Your little Desirée. . . ." It brought to him, vividly, her thin, supple figure; those strange blue eyes that looked widely from beneath the pale eyebrows; and the lips of cherry-red. The song that she had sung that night had been lilting ever since in his mind:

". . . Je perds la tête
'Suis comme une bête."

He saw her in all her alluring languor, secret, and mysterious. And it was the eternal mystery in her that attracted him. For a few moments he hesitated, indeterminately, at the telephone. "*Eh bien, mon vieux*," called Charnac's voice. "Will you come? 11.30 at the Chariot d'Or."

"I'll come," said Humphrey.

It was ten-thirty. Ripples of unrest stirred his mind; he felt deeply agitated. He knew that he was on the brink of a new and complex development in

his life; and the future stretched before him, vague and impenetrable, full of a promise of mournful and fierce delights, of happiness inconceivable, and sorrow inexperienced. No scruples retarded him now, and the voice of conscience was stilled, but despite all this, an indefinable mist of melancholy clouded his soul.

Dagneau came briskly into the office. Humphrey ceased brooding, and swung round in his chair.

"Lamb," he said, "I'm going out to supper to-night."

"Oh! la! la!" Dagneau laughed. "Who's the lucky lady?"

"Not for the likes of little lambs that have to stay in the office and keep the fort."

Dagneau made a grimace. "I suppose it isn't safe for both of us to leave," he said.

"No fear," Humphrey replied. "There's no knowing what these fellows mayn't be up to in the South. Anyhow, if anything urgent happens, come along to me. I shall be in the Chariot d'Or until one o'clock."

Dagneau was a good fellow, thought Humphrey, as his cab climbed the hill to Montmartre. It was jolly decent of him not to mind. He forgot the office now, and thought only of the night's adventuring. There was fully a half-hour to spare, so he idled it away on the terrace of a café sipping at a liqueur. Every variety of street hawker came to persuade sous from him: they had plaster figures for sale, or wanted to cut his silhouette in black paper, or draw a portrait of him in pastels, or sell him ballads and questionable books, bound in pink, pictorial covers. The toy of the moment, frankly indecent, yet offered with a childlike innocence that made it impossible for one to be disgusted with the vendors, was thrust before him fifty times. They showed him how it worked, and when he refused, they brought from inner pockets picture-postcards which

they tried to show him covertly, until he drove them away with the *argot* he had learned from Dagneau.

At the time appointed a cab climbed the steep Rue Pigalle, and drew up before the Chariot d'Or. Charnac sat in the middle comfortably squeezed in between Margot and Desirée. They waved a cheery greeting as they saw Humphrey, and he helped them down. Without any question he linked his arm in Desirée's, and led her up the brilliant scarlet staircase to the supper-room. Her meek acceptance of him, and the touch of her, gave him a strong sense of possession. This woman acknowledged his right of mastery over her, without a word being spoken, without any pleading, or the bitter pain of uncertainty. From that moment he felt she was his completely and unquestionably. There was no need to woo her and win her; she was to be taken, and she would yield herself up, as women were taken and women yielded themselves up in the earliest days of the earth.

They went to their table. He had no eyes for anyone but Desirée. She threw off her wrap, with a gesture of her shoulders, and as it tumbled from them, they shone white and shapely, and a rose was crushed to her bosom, making a splash of scarlet on her white bodice. She laughed and looked at him frankly, as if there were to be no secrets between them, and once, while the supper was being ordered, her thin hand rested in his, and he was stirred to wild, delicious emotion. Yes, she was all as he had imagined her; she had not changed at all, and her yellow hair and pale eyebrows and thin face culminating in her pointed chin, reminded him of an Aubrey Beardsley picture—those slanting eyes, and red lips eternally shaped for a kiss, and the slender throat that rippled below the white surface of its skin when she spoke, the thin bare arms, and her hands, balanced on delicate wrists—those hands

with their long dainty fingers and exquisite finger-tips. The sight of her inflamed him.

Their conversation was commonplace. Why, she wanted to know, did he run away the last time they met. He lied to her, and pleaded a headache.

"And you won't run off this time?" she asked, with a childish note of appeal in her voice.

He sought her hand and held it in his own. She drew it away with a little grimace. "You're hurting me," she said.

Occasionally Margot cut into their conversation. She lacked the beauty of her sister, her figure was stouter, and her face was not well made-up. She treated Charnac with good-natured tolerance.

During the supper—again the famous mussels—Desirée asked Humphrey many questions about himself—they were not questions which penetrated deeply into his private life, indeed, she showed no desire to pry into his surroundings. She wanted to know his tastes, and his likes and dislikes, and when, sometimes, he said anything that showed that they had something in common, she laughed delightedly at the discovery.

Her eyes held a wonderful knowledge in them, but the boldness of their gaze did not suggest immodesty to him. Her eyes seemed to say: "There are certain things in life we never talk about. But I understand them all, and I know that you know I understand." It made him feel that there was nothing artificial about their friendship; in one bound they had attained perfect understanding, and it was miraculous to him.

It was miraculous to him to sit there, with the music surging in his veins, and to look upon this delicately-wrought creature, beautiful, perfect in body, knowing that when he wished he could take her in his arms, and she would give herself to him without any hesitation. She was utterly strange to him, and yet, by this miracle, their

lives were already commingled in swift intimacy. He thought of the other two women who had influenced his life: though he had kissed them, and spent long hours with them, they seemed now irrevocably distant from him, and never had he penetrated to the stratum of full comprehension that lay below the surface of misunderstandings . . .

He looked back on the years that were past, and he could only see himself struggling and pleading and breaking his heart to win that which was won now without any contest at all. Was it love or passion that he wanted from them. Ah! if we would only be frank with ourselves, and admit that there is no love without passion, there is no passion without love: that by separating passion from love, it has become a degraded and hidden thing.

And Humphrey wanted love: the desire for love, love inseparable from passion, had made a turbulent underflow beneath the stream of his life. Twice he had tried to grasp love, twice it had eluded him. He had been despoiled by circumstance . . . cheated by his own conscience.

It was miraculous to him now, that he should be able to wrest his prize from life with so little struggle after all. He looked at Desirée, and her eyes smiled — how incredibly near they seemed to one another, how the unattainable drew close to him and smiled. . . .

He became aware of his name spoken aloud, and he looked up and saw a waiter looking round the room, with Dagneau at his side. Dagneau's face was strained and anxious. He seemed out of breath. Suddenly he caught sight of Humphrey, and hurried towards him. He raised his hat to the group. "Pardon, mad'm'selle," he said to Desirée, as he put a telegram before Humphrey.

The blue slips pasted on the paper danced before his eyes.

"*Qu'est que c'est?*" Margot asked, fussily.

"Ferrol wants you to go to Narbonne," Dagneau said. "There's been shooting there. . . . I looked up the trains. You can catch the one o'clock from the Gare d'Orsay if you hurry."

Humphrey stared stupidly at the telegram, and Desirée touched him with her hand.

"*C'est quelque chose de grave?*" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Narbonne," he said to Charnac, laconically.

"*Oh! nom d'un nom*—to-night?" asked Charnac. "*C'est embêtant, ça.*"

And, suddenly, Humphrey grew peaceful again, and all the turbulence of his thoughts calmed down and flowed towards the one desire that he had made paramount in his life—the desire of the journalist for news, the longing of the historian for history.

Fleet Street called to him from those blue strips with their printed message. "Go Narbonne immediately cover riots," and the signature that symbolized Fleet Street—"Ferrol"—held in it all the power that had made him a puppet of Fate.

But Narbonne. . . . From all parts of Europe the Special Correspondents would be converging on the town. There would be great doings to describe, new interests to make him forget rapidly.

Dagneau helped him on with his coat. "Send on my bag," he said, glancing at his watch. "I'm awfully sorry," he added to Charnac. "You'll understand. Explain to them, won't you? Dagneau, stop and finish my supper."

He forgot everything else . . . what else mattered?

"*Dis donc*," Desirée said, "are you going again?" How surprisingly unimportant she seemed at this

moment. Her expression was half-suppliant, half-petulant. "If you go," she said distinctly, "I will never speak to you again—never."

As if she could hold him back when others had failed! But he was moved to show her tenderness. A momentary pang of regret shot across him because he had to leave her. "Don't be cross," he whispered. "I shall be back in three days."

She turned her head away impetuously. And he realized that there never had been, nor ever could be, anything in common between them.

Once, when he was dozing in the train speeding southwards to Bordeaux, he woke up and laughed as he remembered the ludicrous amazement on the face of Desirée as he left her suddenly and gladly to take up his work.

VIII

THE matters that occupied his mind belonged only to his work. In the early morning at Bordeaux, when he had to change, he bought a budget of morning papers, and read them in the refreshment-room over his roll and coffee. The news was alarming enough: people were fleeing from Narbonne and the neighbouring towns. Seven had been shot in a riot on the previous night; the soldiery was in charge of the town, and martial law had been proclaimed.

The French journalists excelled themselves in superlatives . . . their stories were vain accounts of personal emotions and experiences, for it is the fashion with them to thrust their personality in front of the news.

Thereafter, on the journey to Narbonne, Humphrey wondered how he was going to get his telegrams out of the town, if it were besieged. He bought a map of the district and studied it: it might be necessary to send a courier to Perpignan, or back to Bordeaux, or, if things were very bad indeed, there were carrier pigeons; the Spanish frontier at Port Bou was not very far away also . . . perhaps, he could find some one to whom to telephone. It was his business to get any news out of Narbonne, and there would be no excuse for failure

The people in his carriage were talking of the shooting.

"I shouldn't like to be going there," one said.

"It will be worse to-night," another remarked. "Those Southerners lose their heads so quickly."

It seemed odd to Humphrey that while they were

talking of it in this detached way, he alone, probably, out of the whole train-load, was about to plunge into the actualities of revolution of his own free will. For the next few days he would be living with the grievances of the wine-growers, learning things that were unknown to him now. He would have to record and describe all that happened. His was the power to create sympathy in English households for the wrongs of these people starving in the midst of their fertile vineyards.

The brakes jarred the carriages of the train. Heads were put out of the window. On the up-line a goods train carrying flour had met with an accident. The engine lay grotesquely on one side, powdered with white flour, and the vans looked as if they had been out in a snow-storm. The melancholy sight of the shattered train slid past, as their own train jolted slowly on its journey.

"What is it—have they wrecked the train?" some one asked.

"No," another said, pointing to a paragraph in the paper, "it was an accident. The engine ran off the metals last night. It's in the *Depêche de Toulouse*."

They all chattered among themselves. It was a trivial affair, then—one had thought for a moment that those sacred Narbonnais . . .!

But there was something sinister in that wrecked train with its broken vans and its engine covered in a cloud of white. It seemed to presage disaster, as it lay there outside the door of the town.

The train stopped. "Narbonne" cried the porters. Humphrey descended as though it was the commonest thing in his life to enter garrisoned cities. The platform was full of soldiers, some standing with fixed bayonets. others sleeping on straw beside their stacked arms. Officers strolled up and down to the clank of their swords; outside, through the door of the station, itself

guarded by an infantryman in a blue coat, with its skirts tucked back, he caught a glimpse of horses tethered to the railings.

Nobody stopped him but the ticket-collector : in the midst of all this outward display of militarism, the business of the station went on as usual. Trains steamed in and departed ; expresses pounded through on their way to Paris ; porters were busy with parcels. The hotel buses were drawn up outside, just as if nothing in the world had happened to disturb the life of the town. He chose the Hotel Dorade omnibus, and away they went.

The streets were lined with soldiers bivouacking on the pavements. The avenue from the station was a long line of stacked rifles, and soldiers in blue and red lounging against the walls, smoking cigarettes, or lying on the pavement, where beds of hay had been made. Many of the shops were shuttered. He looked up, and the flat roofs of the houses were like barracks, with the *képis* of soldiers visible between the chimney-pots. The bus passed an open square—cavalry held it, and another street, broad and long, leading from it, was a camp of white tents.

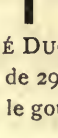
Sentries guarded the bridges across the river, and though the main Boulevard was free of soldiers, he saw a hint of power in the courtyards of large houses. The walls were placarded with green and yellow posters, addressed to "Citoyens," urging them to resist the Government. The soldiers read them idly.

And, in the midst of all this, the people of Narbonne sat outside the cafés in the sunshine, under the red and white striped awnings, drinking their vermouth or absinthe !

Later, after he had taken his room at the Hotel Dorade, he walked about the town through the ranks of the soldiers. Groups of people stood here and there,

with grim faces and stern-set lips; they looked revengefully at officers and mounted police, and whenever a regiment marched into the town to the music of its drums and bugles, it was greeted with hoarse shouts of derision, and mocking cries of "Assassins!"

At the corner of a street of shops he came upon a little mound of stones set round a dark stain on the cobbled road; a wreath was laid there, and a night-light still burned under a glass cover. A piece of white cardboard, cut in the shape of a miniature tombstone, rested against a brick. He read the ill-written inscription on the card:—



RENÉ DUCLOS
âgé de 29 ans
assasiné par le gouvernement.

There were seven other little memorial mounds in the neighbourhood. Each one of them marked where a victim had fallen to the soldiers' ball cartridge. One of the cardboard tombstones bore a woman's name. Her death was one of the inexplicable accidents of life: she was to have been married on the morrow. On her way she had been carried along in the crowd which was marching towards the Town Hall . . . and in a minute she was dead.

These signs of tragedy made a deep impression on Humphrey's journalistic sense. He saw that the soldiers had not dared to move the mounds that reminded the people of the dreadful happenings in their midst. And they were surrounded by little silent crowds, who spelt out the inscriptions, sighed, and departed with mutterings.

A man with bloodshot eyes, and unkempt hair, his chin thick with bristles, lurched across the road, and stood by Humphrey, regarding him with a curious, persistent gaze. Humphrey moved away, and the man edged after him. He made for the main Boulevards where the crowded cafés gave him a sense of safety. He turned round, and saw that he was still being shadowed.

A voice hailed him from a café: he turned and saw O'Malley, the Irishman of *The Sentinel.*

"Hallo," said O'Malley, "been here long?"

"Just arrived," Humphrey said. He was glad to see a friend. That unkempt man who had followed him made him feel uncomfortably insecure.

"Where are you stopping?" O'Malley asked.

"At the Dorade."

"I'm there too: there's a whole gang of French and English fellows here. Been having no end of adventures. My carriage was held up outside Argelliers yesterday, and they wanted to see my papers. As bad as the flight to Varennes, isn't it?" He laughed, and they sat down to drink.

The unkempt man took up his position against the parapet of the bridge opposite.

Humphrey noticed that O'Malley wore a white band round his arm with a blue number on it, and his name, coupled with *The Sentinel*, written in ink that had frayed itself into the fabric.

"You'll have to get one of these," O'Malley explained. "It isn't safe to be a stranger here. They're issued by the People's Committee to journalists who show their credentials. A lot of detectives have been down here, you see, posing as journalists, and asking questions in the villages, getting all sorts of information; that's how they managed to arrest the ringleaders in the villages."

"It was a pretty mean trick," Humphrey said.

"Mean—I should think it was. They nearly lynched Harridge, the photographer, yesterday, and they chased another so-called journalist to the river, and he had to swim for his life, while the mob fired pot-shots at him from the bridges. So now they've placarded the town to explain that every real journalist has a white armband with a number on it."

Humphrey looked at the shaggy man opposite. "Good Lord!" he said, "that's why that fellow's been shadowing me. . . ."

"Yes. He's one of the Committee's spies."

"I'd better get that armband quick."

"No hurry. You're all serene in my company. We'll finish our drink and stroll up together."

On the way O'Malley told him some of the latest developments. The chief ringleader, the man whom the wine-growers hailed as the Redeemer, was still at large, and nobody knew where he was. Picture-postcards of the bearded man with a halo round his head and a bunch of grapes dangling from a cross that he held in his right hand, were selling in thousands at two sous each.

"To-morrow there are the funerals," remarked O'Malley. "Seven funerals at once. It ought to make a good story."

They came to a dingy house, where there were no soldiers. Humphrey followed O'Malley up a narrow, twisting staircase to a little room. The walls were plastered with the posters he had seen on the street hoardings. Five men sat in the room, smoking cigarettes. The air was full of the stale reek of cheap tobacco. They sat in their shirt-sleeves with piles of papers before them.

One of them, a gross man with a black moustache straggling over his heavy under lip, spread out his fat

hands in inquiry. Another, thin, undersized and dirty, with a rat-like face, peered at them with blinking red-rimmed eyes.

"What do you want?" he asked, gruffly.

O'Malley, in his best Irish-French, explained his business and presented Humphrey. The hollow farce of polite phrases, which mean nothing in France, was played out. They wanted to see his *carte d'identité* and all the credentials he had. Humphrey unloaded his pocket-book on them. Finally, they made him sign a book, and they gave him a white armlet; he pinned it round his arm, and walked forth a free man. The unkempt man stood on the opposite side of the street still watching him.

And now, as he walked along the streets of Narbonne, with the white armlet of the revolutionaries giving him protection, he smiled to see the soldiers guarding the streets.

"Look here," he said to O'Malley, "who's going to give me anything to prevent the soldiers bayoneting me?"

"Yes—I've thought of that too," O'Malley answered. "Funny, isn't it, that we've got to fly for a safeguard to the People's Committee? By the way, don't you get talking to strangers more than you can help. They're down on spies. I'm going to get my copy off now. See you at the post-office."

Humphrey went back to the Dorade, and wrote his message, a descriptive account of all that he had seen, in abbreviated telegraphese. Other correspondents were there, war correspondents used to open campaigns, prepared for all emergencies; others had come from the Fleet Streets of Spain and Belgium and Germany. There was an American, too, who had travelled from Paris: as he had not yet obtained his armband, he remained in the hotel, writing very alarming telegrams.

The Englishmen dined together—a jolly party—at a large round table, and, afterwards, they all went out to look at the town at night under arms. Once, during their walk, the sound of firing came to them, and they ran helter-skelter up the Boulevard right into the arms of a young lieutenant, who laughed and told them that nothing serious had happened. He invited them all to a drink in a café, and just to satisfy them, Humphrey went reconnoitring and found that all was peaceful.

He had no time to think of anything but his work. At midnight he went to bed and slept deeply.

On the second day the "Redeemer," whom every one had imagined to be captured, suddenly appeared in Narbonne, and was whisked away in a motor-car to Argelliers, his native town. Bouvier, of the *Petit Journal*, saw him, dashed into a motor-garage, and hired a car in an instant.

"*Viens*," he shouted, as Humphrey strolled down the Street. "The 'Redeemer' has come back. You can share my car." Humphrey, knowing nothing except that Bouvier was very excited, and that, by a chance, some big news had come under his notice, jumped into the car, and away they whirled into the open country.

The Southern landscape was vivid in the hot sunshine of the late autumn; they left clouds of dust behind them as the car raced along to overtake the car of the "Redeemer." They passed the spacious vineyards, where the grapes grew like stunted hop-fields, twining round their little sticks; they sped through avenues of poplars, and almond trees and ilex; through villages where old women cheered and pointed down the long road.

"We're catching him up," Bouvier grunted. "They must have heard the news of his coming somehow."

A bend in the road, and a bridge with the blue river running beneath its arches; farmhouses and boys driving cattle home; children swinging on a gate, and old men plodding towards the sunset, on sticks that could never straighten their bent backs: the country came at them and receded from them in a succession of pictures framed in the hood of their car. Vineyards, and again vineyards, with the ungathered grapes withering in the sun, and people crying to them, "He's come back: the brave fellow."

As the road led nearer to Argelliers they overtook yellow coaches, full of people, and country carts swinging along. The drivers pointed their whips ahead, and shouted something, but the words were lost in the rush of the wind as the car rushed by them.

"The whole countryside seems to know that he's escaped. There'll be thousands in the Market Place," Bouvier said.

"It'll be a fine story," Humphrey agreed. "Those other fellows must have missed it." He was drunk with the excitement and the happiness of hunting a quarry.

They came to the Market Place of Argelliers, and the sight amazed him.

Left and right the people crushed together—a rectangular pattern of humanity. People of all ages had been drawn there by the magnetism of this man who had stirred up the South to revolt. The caps and dresses of the women and girls gave touches of colour to the sombre crowd of men, and, as he stood up in the motor-car for a better view, he saw row upon row of pink, upturned faces, parted, eager lips, and eyes that strained against the sunshine to see the black-clad figure of a man standing on the low roof of the People's Committee. Boys had climbed the trees round the Market Place—their gaping faces shone from the dark branches; and on the outskirts

of the vast crowd men and women stood up in carts and waggonettes—horses had been harnessed to anything that ran on wheels.

There was not a soldier in sight. The sun shone fiercely on the Market Place of Argelliers, where two thousand people were thinking of their wrongs. And the man on the roof talked to them. His voice, strong and sonorous, came to them, urging them to be of good cheer. They flung back at him cries of encouragement, and called him by name.

"I'm going into the crowd," Humphrey said.

"Better stop here," urged Bouvier. "They're an excitable lot."

"I must hear what he's saying."

Humphrey climbed out of the car, and pushed his way into the middle of the crowd. There was a loud shouting over some remark that the speaker had made. He found himself wedged in tightly between heavy, broad-shouldered men, with black eyes and swarthy faces. He heard the man on the roof speak about those who had been attacking him, and a voice close to Humphrey yelled, "*La Depêche de Toulouse*," and immediately another voice cried out, "*Conspuez la Depêche de Toulouse.*" He turned at the voice and saw, with a sudden shock, the shaggy-haired man with the bloodshot eyes who had dogged his footsteps that first day in Narbonne. Their glances met. Humphrey thrust back into his pocket the pencil with which he had been making furtive notes.

"*Conspuez les autres!*" cried the man with the bloodshot eyes, "*conspuez les mouchards.*"

He was conscious of a new note in the crowd: he saw anger and hatred passing swiftly over all the faces around him. They turned on him with relentless eyes. He saw the shaggy-haired man shouldering his way, and scrambling towards him with crooked fingers that

clawed at the air. In one quick second he realized that he was in danger.

"*Conspuez les autres.*" The cry rose all about him swelling to a roar of confusion.

"*En voilà un!*" shouted the shaggy man, pointing to Humphrey's white armband. They surged against him, and he was swept from his feet. He heard the shriek of women, and the babble and a murmur that ran like an undercurrent through the storm of noisy voices. The black figure on the roof was wringing his hands, and trying to calm the mob.

Humphrey turned to escape. "What a fool I was to come into the thick of it," he thought. Once, in the struggle, he saw Bouvier standing with a white face in the motor-car, probably wondering what the row was about.

And then, they came at him suddenly and determinedly. Remorseless and menacing faces were thrust close to him. He struck out and a thrill went up his arm as his fist met a hard cheek-bone.

Something fell on his arm with a heavy, aching blow that left it numb and limp, and at the same moment an excruciating spasm of self-pity swept upward from his soul, as he saw, as in a red mist, uplifted, clenched hands struggling to meet him. This was real life at last. He had ceased to be an onlooker; the game was terrible and earnest, and he was, for the first time, the principal figure in the play. His agony did not last long.

The hot breath of the men was on him, and the evil, bloodshot eyes of the shaggy-haired man who had denounced him, loomed terribly large, like great red-veined moons.

And, in that last moment, before all consciousness went from him for ever, as he swayed and fell before the trampling mob, in that supreme moment when deliver-

ance came from all the tribulations that life held for him, an odd, whimsical idea twisted his lips into a smile as he thought:

"What a ripping story this will make for *The Day*."

THE END

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